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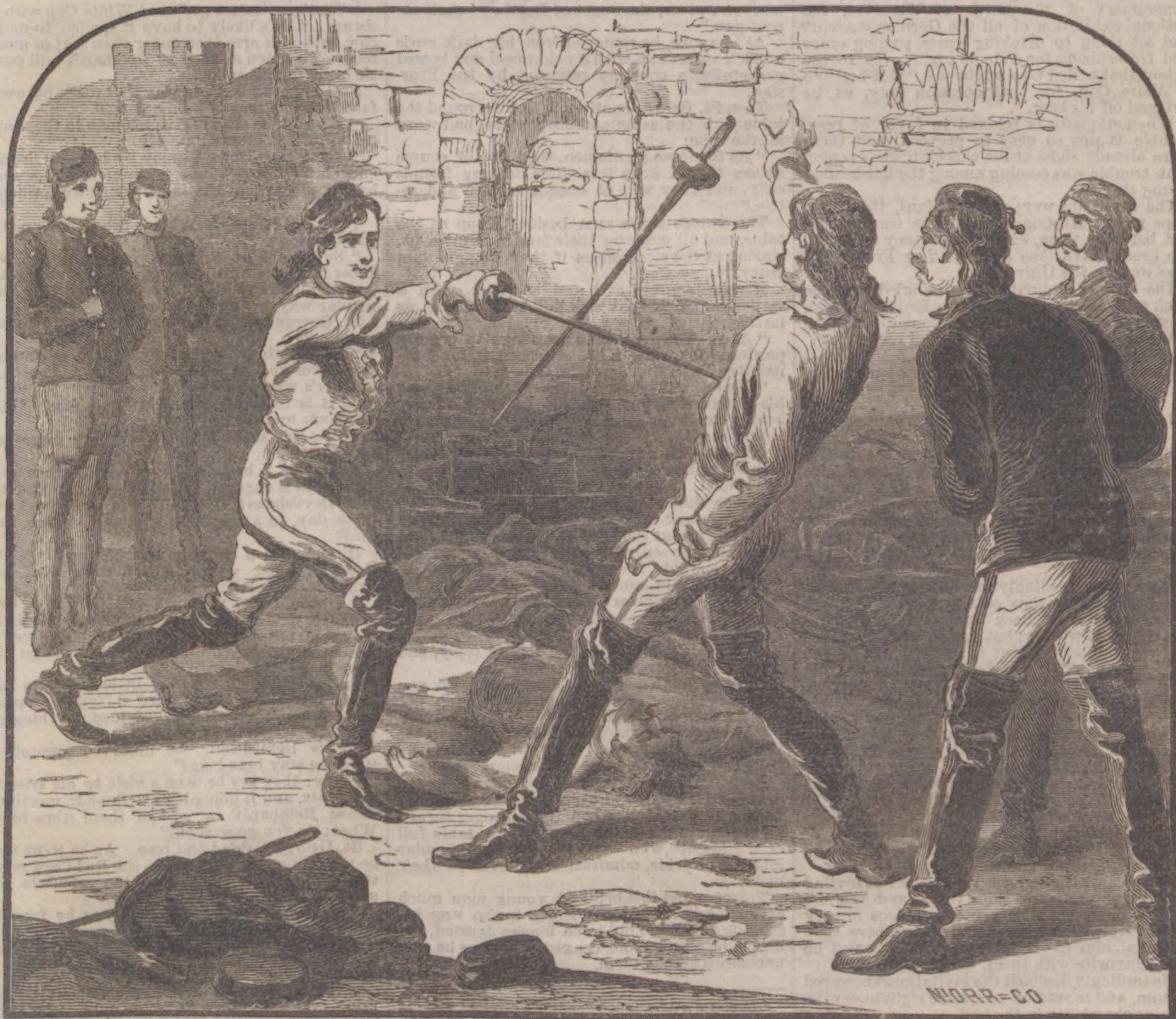
No. 126

The Demon Duelist; or, The League of Steel.

A STORY OF GERMAN STUDENT LIFE.

BY COL. THOMAS HOYER MONSTERY.

Champion-at-arms of North and South America.



KAPP'S SWORD FLEW INTO THE AIR WHILE THE POINT OF THE DEMON DUELIST PIERCED HIS HEART.

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A Story of German Student Life.

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AUTHOR OF "IRON WRIST, THE SWORDMASTER."

CHAPTER I.

THE RATHSKELLER.

A VAST hall had been hewn underground from the solid rock, with piers and arches that seemed the work of giants.

Swinging lamps cast a yellow glare on the sanded floor, and the whole hall was full of a thin bluish haze of tobacco-smoke.

Little round tables were scattered irregularly among the arches, and crowds of young men sat at them and blew rings of smoke with great precision and satisfaction to themselves, as they puffed at their huge meerscham pipes.

Between the times of blowing rings they drank beer, and between both they all talked together, or sung songs. Such was the Rathskeller of the town of Heidelberg, in 1816, and such it stands to-day, nearly unaltered.

But in 1816 things were livelier than now, and the scene was more brilliant. One might see the picturesque costumes of a dozen different provinces of Germany, and among them the members of the student corps, most picturesque of all.

Handsome young fellows they were, who affected long curls of yellow hair, velvet coats, white breeches and long boots of shining leather, the whole topped by the caps of the different "corps" with their hanging tassels.

The White Caps always kept to themselves, apart from Green, Red, Blue and Yellow Caps, with whom their only intercourse was held at the point of the sword on the dueling ground of the University.

And Red, Green, Blue and Yellow Caps observed the same etiquette strictly, each corps to itself.

But on the evening of June 15th, 1816, the anniversary of the battle of Waterloo, the national exultation of all the German students had set them to drinking toasts, singing songs and fraternizing for a single night, even to the extent that a Red Cap might say "Gut heil" to a White Cap, for that occasion only, as he swigged off his beer.

When etiquette is relaxed in favor of beer, trouble is not so easy to prevent, and there were already signs at ten o'clock in the evening that trouble was coming among the hot-headed young students.

The Red Caps were all Prussians, the White Caps mostly Austrians, and there was no love lost between them, except that they all hated the green Bavarians and the few Frenchmen who were in the University.

The buzz of animated talk mingled with the clink of glasses, when one of the Red Caps began to sing a very patriotic song about Blucher the Prussian general, whom he praised for having:

"Beat old Boney out of his boots,
And showed the French how a Prussian shoots,
And kicked Macdonald, and Ney, and Soult,
Till they squealed for very fear."

Just as he was finishing the most vainglorious of these verses, a young man of singular grace and beauty of appearance entered the Rathskeller and sauntered into the midst of the groups of students, with a smile and a bow for all. His hair was dark, and worn long and curling over his shoulders, while his dark aquiline face and keen black eyes showed him to be of Southern birth and probably not a German at all.

It was an exceedingly handsome face, smooth and beardless as that of a girl, with a peachy bloom on the dark cheek that would have captivated most women; but for all that there was a dangerous look about it, chiefly due to the sudden flashing of the dark eyes whenever the stranger turned his head quickly to look at something that attracted his attention.

He was a little above the medium height, with a compact elegance of figure that told of uncommon strength and activity, and his dress was the same as that of most rich students, save that he wore the cap of no corps, though he seemed to be on good terms with all.

Except the Red Caps.

It was noticeable that he bowed to none of them, and that they drew out of his path as he advanced, entirely ignoring his presence.

As he came through the groups he was invited by several parties to join them, and the *kellerinen* or waiter-girls, pretty maidens in very picturesque dresses, clustered near where they expected him to sit, in a way that showed he was a favorite with them, which was a fact.

He smilingly declined the invitations showered on him, and moved on to a table right under the largest chandelier in the hall.

At this table it happened that evening that a party of Red Caps were sitting, and it was

noticed that as the stranger approached the spot, a hush fell on all near it.

The *kellerinen* stood at a little distance, watching and whispering to each other, while the occupants of the adjacent tables gradually turned in their seats, till every one was looking at the Red Caps.

They, on their part, kept up the song they had started about Blucher, and clinked their glasses noisily, but one might see they were not quite easy in their minds, for every now and then they glanced toward the slowly sauntering stranger.

It was evident that something was going to happen.

The handsome young man came up to the table at last and surveyed it coolly, while the talk was hushed around them. The Red Caps ceased to sing, all but one, and even he finally stopped, as if confused.

Then the clear voice of the dark stranger cut the silence like a knife, as he said, addressing Red Cap in French:

"Monsieur is probably not aware that his song is offensive to me. Of course monsieur will apologize at once for insulting the memory of men who helped to give a name to the bridge of Jena."

German students generally talk French well, and Red Cap understood him, for he answered at once:

"Leipsic and Waterloo have wiped out Jena, and no Prussian begs pardon of a Frenchman."

He was rather pale as he spoke.

"Then of course monsieur knows the consequence," was the icy reply, with a cold glitter of the black eyes. "I am the Count of St. George."

"And I am plain Karl Kapp," was the retort.

"Name your time."

Karl Kapp was a robust, florid young Prussian, bigger every way than his antagonist, and yet his voice shook a little as he looked at St. George. There seemed to be something in the slender, dark-eyed stranger that had an appalling effect on every one.

The other Red Caps had sat in silence during the short colloquy, and St. George looked at them in a swift, comprehensive glance, as he said:

"My seconds are Messieurs De Lisle and Louvet; weapons, small-swords; time, dawn, to-morrow; place, the Court of Death. I shall expect you."

As he spoke, he removed from his dark curls a black velvet cap with a gold tassel and bowed gracefully, a courtesy returned by the Prussian.

Then St. George continued, looking round the table with the same smile which he had worn all the time:

"As for these gentlemen, they are of course aware that I keep this table for my friends only, and they will at once apologize and retire."

There were three men besides Kapp at the table, and all were on their feet in a moment, staring at the stranger as if they thought him crazy.

His smile grew evil and sneering, with a sardonic malice, that was positively satanic, as he said:

"Aha! The gentlemen are about to beg my pardon. They are right. I accord it, for I remember Jena."

"Waterloo!" answered one of the Red Caps, his face turning purple with anger. "Blucher beat your man, and I'll beat you, accursed Frenchman!"

Again St. George smiled in his most deadly fashion, as he replied:

"What! Is the gentleman afraid then, as well as a *dummer junger*?"

In a moment the choleric student had hurled his beer glass at the head of the coolly insolent stranger, who only laughed as he jerked his head to one side, thus avoiding the flying glass.

Then he said quietly to the Prussian: "I will fill another glass as large as that with your blood in the morning, if you come with your friend Kapp."

"I will be there," was the defiant reply, and then St. George continued:

"Come, gentlemen, we waste time. Do you apologize for your intrusion on my table?"

Not a man answered.

"Very well, then. I shall expect you in the Death Court at sunrise. You can cast lots who shall be killed first. *Au revoir, messieurs.*"

He lifted his cap with his peculiar haughty grace and the four red-capped Prussians saluted with stiff precision, when the stranger turned on his heel and sauntered away to a table full of White Caps, who received him with a singular mixture of pride, admiration and fear in their looks.

They treated this brilliant young man much as one might treat a pet leopard who was beginning to get too old to be longer trusted, but had to be soothed and coaxed so long as he was unchained among them.

* *Dummer junger* [blockhead] is a straight fighting word among German students. They will stand almost anything else except "*hunde frute*" [literally, dog's foot] or coward.

"*Potz tausend!*" exclaimed Baron Zagonyi, a Hungarian who drove the only four in hand in Heidelberg, and whose face was all slashed up with purplish scars from his almost innumerable duels; "you must have heard that Devilshead was going to carve two of our corps—if he can—to-morrow, and have come in to make the matter square by taking four of his men. Eh, Monsieur le Comte?"

St. George smiled slightly and beckoned to the prettiest *kellerin* to bring him something to drink before he replied: "I may not fight four of them."

"Eh? And why not? You have agreed to." "To be at the Death Court, ready for them, that was all."

"Do you mean they will not come?"

"They will all come; but two will not fight."

He nodded his head familiarly to the *kellerin*, who had brought him a *schoppen* of wine, and began to sip his *Liebfraumilch* as calmly as ever.

"How mean you they will not fight?" asked the White Cap amazedly.

"Simply that they will apologize on the ground," answered St. George in a negligent way. "But, who is this man of whom you talked—Devilshead? Is he a Prussian too?"

There was always a singular change in the face of this singular youth when he spoke of or to a Prussian. His handsome features worked into a mocking sneer, and his fine eyes half closed, as he peeped through between the lids like a wild beast that pretends sleep to make a surer spring on a venturesome intruder.

"A Prussian? Yes. Did you never hear of Graf * von Steinmark of Pomerania, the man who has slashed more faces without a mark to himself than any man in Heidelberg?"

"But he is entered at Bonn," said St. George, gravely. "How comes he here?"

"Oh, I suppose in search of a quarrel or two," answered White Cap with a shrug. "He found one quick enough with Reinhardt and Scheuermann however. Singular that he and you should fight at the same time and perhaps same place."

"Oh no, *mon cher*. I fight in only one place; and if this Devilshead tries to enter it, Emil St. George will have a word to say to it. I should like to see this Devilshead. They tell me he is a good-looking fellow."

"That's as tastes go," said White Cap with a shrug. "He's likely to have it spoiled to-morrow unless his arm is stronger than that of most men. Two men as good as Reinhardt will puzzle even Devilshead."

St. George smiled in a way that made his own face look like that of a fallen angel.

"We will see who carves his man in the neatest way," he observed quietly.

"Come, messieurs, I fancy we have all drank enough for steady hands, in the morning; or perhaps you have no affairs of your own for day-break?"

The White Caps shook their heads, and one of them said:

"But do not let us keep you, count; for we know how needful is sleep to a person engaging in such an affair. How are you to fight? in the regular way or your own fashion?"

St. George laughed an airy laugh as he said mockingly:

"Do you think a Frenchman, whose father was decorated at Jena, would ape a Prussian butcher's way of doing his business? No, *mon ami*, it is to be the point, a *Poutrance*. Will you come and see it, think you?"

White Cap shook his head in a very regretful way.

"Ah, count," he said, "how can I, when my own corps is engaged on the same morning to fight Devilshead? Couldn't you put yours off for a day, to give us all a chance to see the fun?"

He spoke in a coaxing sort of way, but St. George replied, with a grave smile that no longer looked diabolical:

"I should like to oblige you; but it is my principle never to postpone business of this sort. You shall see Kapp and Finkel laid out ready to measure to-morrow, and the rest shall go on their knees or follow."

As he spoke, he rolled a little cigarette between his fingers and lighted it, for it seemed as if his handsome mouth disdained anything so vulgarly German as a pipe.

"This Devilshead," he observed presently: "will he stay here long?"

"Nay: they say he is on a visit to his friend, Von Retz, and is going back to Bonn to-morrow, unless Reinhardt or one of them stops him. What: do you go so soon?"

St. George nodded and rose. As he went out he passed by the table where the Red Caps were still sitting over their beer, too proud to go away to sleep while he remained.

"Messieurs," he said, carelessly as he passed, "the sun rises to-morrow at half-past four, and the man first on the ground can say he waited for the rest."

* Graf in German is count in French, earl in English. It is customary to call a Graf "the Herr Graf" when not using his name after the title.

The title of duke in German is Herzog, used always with the name and without the prefix "Herr."

He sauntered out among the tables, and one group of Red Caps drew out of his path to eye him furtively, while a Green Cap whispered his friend:

"Do you know that man?"

"No, who is he?" The second Green Cap was a new student.

"That is the Frenchman they call the Demon Duelist. He has killed his man every time he has fought."

CHAPTER II.

THE DEMON DUELIST.

THE castle of Heidelberg with its long lines of once magnificent, now ruined buildings, covers several acres of ground, and one may easily lose oneself among its numerous courts and galleries even to-day, when houses are thick around it.

But at the period of our story the neighborhood was wild and scantily peopled and few tourists visited the ruins, while the students used it for their dueling ground on account of its immunity from disturbance by police or others.

Moreover, it was but a few miles, by a wild forest road, to the frontiers of Hesse Darmstadt, in case of a fatal termination to any "affair," and Hesse was another State with a distinct government.

"Affairs" at Heidelberg were of two kinds, "regular," and "a *l'outrance*."

In "regular" duels the men wore armor on body and limbs, leaving only the head exposed, and used the "*schlager*" (literally "beater")—a cutting sword sharp as a razor, with a basket hilt of iron.

Affairs a *l'outrance* were fought in shirt and trousers, with saber or small-sword.

"Regular" affairs rarely resulted in worse than a horribly gashed face; but affairs a *l'outrance* were in many cases fatal.

"Regular" affairs were fought in a beer garden near the ruins, known as "Schneider's," and were so nearly public that they were only hidden from the townsfolk by a species of slang.

A student would say:

"Our corps furnishes beer at Schneider's to-morrow, and red roses will be worn chiefly."

This meant that his corps had issued a challenge to all comers, and that the Red Caps would be their chief antagonists.

But the affairs a *l'outrance* were rarely spoken of among even the students, and they were held in a distant court among the ruins, known by the sinister title of the "Court of Death."

Fatal duels were rare at Heidelberg till the coming of the Count of St. George, owing to a terrible encounter which took place in the ardent days of the first French Revolution and which gave the Court of Death its ominous name.

Four French officers had there met four other Frenchmen who were exiled Royalist nobles, and seven dead bodies had been found there on next day. The eighth man had never been seen or heard of afterward.

They buried the bodies in a common grave where they fell, and the Court of Death was shunned from that time till 1816, when the young Count of St. George, a Frenchman, became a student.

Before he had been there a week, he called out and killed Karl Von Roon, son of the Chancellor of Prussia, in a duel a *l'outrance* in the Death Court, and from that time hardly a week passed in which another fight did not follow, in all of which St. George killed his man. It was further observed that he only forced quarrels on Prussians of the Red Corps.

It might seem incredible that a man should thus set the law at defiance without punishment; but, after the Napoleonic wars, life was held of small account in Europe compared with custom, and custom said "fight" every time.

Here, then, in the Court of Death, on the morning of the 16th of July, 1816, the damp vapors still hung, while the rays of the half-risen sun cast a red glow on the summits of the turrets of Heidelberg, when a party of seven students, all wearing the Red Cap, picked their way through the ruins and entered the Death Court.

Karl Kapp and his three friends headed the party; and two grave gentlemen in uniform, with a third bearing a case of surgeon's tools, brought up the rear.

The said little as they advanced, except that one observed, as they neared the place of rendezvous:

"The sun is not quite up. We shall be first on the ground."

Nevertheless they were mistaken, for as they entered the court they were met by two men carrying picks and spades, one of whom swung an extinguished lantern in his hand.

Karl Kapp, who was in advance, saluted them familiarly and asked:

"What have you been doing boys?"

"The man with the lantern shrugged his shoulders.

"Executing an order, *mein herr*. I would like such every night, for the gentleman paid us three thalers for each. Good-day."

The workmen shambled off, and the Germans

entered the court, only to utter a simultaneous cry of surprise, not unmingled with fear.

The Count of St. George and two others, wrapped in dark cloaks, were sitting on the green mound beneath which rested the bodies of the seven Frenchmen.

They were tranquilly smoking cigarettes, and before them lay four fresh open graves, all in a row.

The moment the Germans had given way to their natural feelings at such a sight, they were ashamed of themselves; but St. George had already risen with his two friends, and was waiting for them with the same evil smile which he always showed to a Red Cap.

His two friends advanced, bowing low, and "hoped the gentlemen would pardon the appearance of the court. The count was desirous of having the work done neatly, but the German peasants were so stupid. Would it please the gentlemen to draw lots for the graves, or would they prefer to begin at the right, as they fought?"

The Germans were too much incensed, after they had subdued the involuntary thrill of horror, to make any reply. Their principal second made an impatient gesture:

"You have the choice of weapons. Is it rapier or saber?"

"The point, of course," was the soft reply of the Frenchman. "If the first gentleman is ready we will begin operations at once."

Karl Kapp immediately began to take off his coat and waistcoat, while the Count of St. George dropped the long cloak he had hitherto worn, and appeared in the black velvet breeches, high polished boots and elaborately ruffled shirt that became a dandy student of those days.

Then the German seconds came forward, and one of them said:

"Does your friend wear armor? We must search him."

It was a custom rigorously observed at all duels; but to their surprise the count himself interfered and said in a sharp tone:

"I will not be searched by any but my own seconds. No Prussian lays his hand on me. I give my word I wear no armor. Is that enough?"

The German seconds hesitated, but Kapp imitated his adversary's breach of etiquette by saying:

"Let it go, I'll trust him. Give us the swords, Goebel."

The Red Caps bowed, and then closely inspected the swords handed them by the Frenchmen, with which they expressed themselves satisfied.

Then Kapp faced the Count of St. George, the swords clashed, and in another moment St. George had sprung back, and stood with his sword hand resting on his bent knee, in a crouching posture, the evil triumphant smile on his face which had gained him the title of the Demon Duelist, as if he would invite his antagonist to attack if he dared advance.

The attitude was a puzzle to the young German, who had never seen it before, but he advanced cautiously within distance and finally lunged out at St. George.

Like a flash from a thundercloud the Frenchman's bright blade made a sudden whirl, and in the same instant Kapp's sword flew into the air, almost striking one of his seconds, while the point of the Demon Duelist pierced his heart as he started back.

Without so much as a groan the unhappy youth dropped on the ground, and St. George beckoned to the next German.

"Come, Monsieur Ritter, it is your turn, if you are not afraid to take your friend's sword."

Ritter was another Red Cap, and his face had grown perceptibly paler as he slowly walked forward to take the sword from the dead man's hand.

His seconds hurried to his side while the surgeon was looking at the lifeless body of Kapp; when St. George called out to his second:

"Apportez moi le verre!" [Bring me the glass.]

Then Ritter's face grew livid as he remembered how he had thrown a glass at the Frenchman the night before, and also remembered how St. George had promised to fill a similar glass with his blood that morning.

But Ritter was a brave man, and he never showed it more than on this occasion, when he took his place and measured swords with his foe.

St. George had taken the beer glass from his second's hand and held it by his side, smiling in the same triumphant manner as before.

But Ritter was not the man to die tamely, and as soon as the swords were crossed he made a furious attack on St. George, hoping to disable him before he caught his guard.

All in vain.

At his third lunge the sword was sent flying from his hand and St. George stabbed him, then coolly held the glass to the wound to catch the blood, ere the dying man had quite lost his senses.

A cry of horror and hatred in one burst from the other Prussians, and not even the etiquette of the ground would have restrained them from an indiscriminate assault on one who seemed to

take such a malignant pleasure in slaughter, had not the two French seconds sprung forward, showing pistols.

Then St. George said, sarcastically:

"You do not like this weapon? You can change it if you please. I am not very particular, my friends."

The third Red Cap, who had been full of nervous tremor in his excitement, jumped at the idea.

"Yes, yes, the saber, the sater! I'll try him with the saber."

St. George coolly poured the glass of blood into one of the empty graves, and selected a saber from one handed him by the German seconds.

It was a long narrow strip of steel, ground sharp as a razor on both sides, and having a basket hilt of iron straps to cover the hand.

The third Red Cap's name was Meyer, and he immediately threw himself into the ordinary dueling attitude with the hanging guard in front of his head.

St. George on the other hand, after the first clash of the swords, leaped back and stood in the same apparently careless attitude, his sword band on his advanced knee, waiting.

Meyer was an old schlager duelist, and he immediately darted in, in hope of the usual shower of blows at close quarters in which he had often indulged with White Caps.

But he had no chance here. St. George did not even meet his sword, but moved his lithe body to one side as Meyer's first blow passed him, and in another moment had dealt the other a slash across the throat which sent him gasping to the ground, his head nearly severed from his body, the carotid artery and jugular vein spouting catarracts of blood.

The Demon Duelist looked down on his third victim with the same old smile of scorn, and said to his fourth foe, who came resolutely up, sword in hand, to face certain death:

"Monsieur sees how much better it is to apologize than to fight. Monsieur is of course ready to apologize for his impertinent intrusion on my table; is it not so, *mein herr*?"

But Red Cap only shook his head, and frowned as he answered:

"You had no right to monopolize that table, and you know it. Kill me if you like. I can die fighting, but you can't fight all Prussia. On guard!"

St. George shrugged his shoulders and sprung back to his usual waiting attitude, when the last Red Cap attacked him furiously, but more cautiously than the third had done, compelling even the Demon Duelist, with all his marvelous skill, to come to his guard and beat off several blows.

The German got so near him that the swords crossed, much as in a common schlager duel, where the men are not allowed to spring back, and for a few moments the click! click! of the weapons was like the rattle of sticks beating a carpet.

Then on a sudden St. George threw up the other's sword with his own, grasped his wrist with his left hand quick as a flash, and dealt him a horrible slash on the right side of the neck, which cut the carotid artery in two.

With a hoarse groan the dying Prussian dropped his saber, and St. George turned to the horror-stricken seconds and politely inquired:

"If the gentlemen are willing to say that this has been a fair duel, or shall we proceed with the rest? We are three to four."

"In God's name, go! You are Satan himself," muttered one of the German students, his face blanched with uncontrollable horror. "Leave us alone with our dead comrades if you are not altogether a devil."

St. George smiled, threw down his sword and tranquilly donned his garments before he spoke again.

When he came back the surgeon had risen with a sigh, saying:

"Poor Beutsch! He too is dead! All are dead! *Mein Gott!* what a demon!"

St. George cast the end of his long Italian cloak over his shoulder, and quietly replied:

"As you say, I am a demon. If you knew what made me so, you would not wonder at my hating Red Caps. *Au revoir, monsieur*. I am going over the frontier for a little, till your police have gone to sleep."

Then he lifted his cap with a grave, sweet smile, very different from his expression while facing the Prussians, and moved off with his seconds among the ruins, disappearing round an angle of the building.

Then said Berger, one of the seconds, and he ground his teeth as he said the words:

"That man must be killed!"

"Easy enough said," muttered his fellow; "but who shall do it?"

"I know of only one, and that is Steinmark," returned Berger. "They call him Devilshead, and I believe he could beat the devil himself."

The other's face cleared up.

"True. Devilshead is the man. Let us go to him."

"Where is he?" asked Berger.

"In Schneider's garden where he has two regular affairs now," was the reply. "Let us go there."

CHAPTER III.

THE FRAULEIN EMILIA.

ON the frontier of Hesse Darmstadt, toward the grand duchy of Baden, at the time of our story, extended a wild forest, held in evil repute in both provinces and stretching into both.

Here, after the Napoleonic wars, when all Europe was too much exhausted to pay much heed to internal matters, clustered bands of footpads, remnants of former armies, and few people dared its recesses except duelists who were escaping from one province to the other after a fatal affair.

These men generally went on foot, armed, and seldom carried much money, wherefore they were allowed to pass, unmolested, by a narrow path that led from the rear of Heidelberg castle toward Darmstadt and Frankfurt. There seemed to be no enmity between them and the brigands.

There was, however, a broad highway through the center of the forest that led from Frankfurt to Baden, which passed close to Heidelberg, leading to a ferry over the Rhine, and which had a bad reputation among travelers.

Over this road, about ten o'clock in the morning of the 16th of July, a large traveling carriage, of a pattern then common, now obsolete, was bowling rapidly along behind four horses ridden by postillions. In this carriage, lying back on the cushions, was a young lady whose fair, delicate style of beauty marked her as belonging to some noble family of Germany.

Her blue eyes, clear-cut profile, white and red complexion, and especially her wealth of bright golden curls, were all those of the high-bred German race in its best type.

She was richly dressed and accompanied by a white-haired dame who seemed to be a sort of humble companion and chaperone in one.

The young lady was gazing listlessly out of the windows, while the older one nodded beside her, pretending not to be asleep as well as she knew how, but succeeding indifferently.

The carriage rolled along over a good smooth road, made in the heyday of Napoleon's power for the transport of troops, and a variety of charming prospects opened on the young lady's sight as they came to vistas in the forest.

At last she sat up with a look of pleased interest on her face and cried:

"Oh, Frau Stock, look, look! There is the Rhine at last, down in the valley below us."

Frau Stock awoke with a snort, turned red and confused, stammering:

"Yes, gracious *fraulein*, certainly it is the Rhine. It rises in the mountains of the Tyrol—runs north-west—"

She was interrupted by a silvery laugh from her charge.

"Oh, Stock, Stock, you were asleep—you know you were. We're not studying geography now. Here is the Rhine right before us, and this must be what they call Robber's Hill. Isn't it romantic? How I wish Otto were here to tell us all the legends of this forest."

Frau Stock sat up now, broad awake and very nervous.

"What did the gracious *fraulein* say was the name of this hill?" she stammered.

"Why, Robber's Hill, of course! This is one of the places where Karl von Moor used to rally his band."

Frau Stock looked relieved.

"Oh, you mean in the play of the Robbers. But then, Schiller didn't always tell the truth, *Fraulein* Emilia, and we are in no danger."

Emilia sighed romantically.

"Oh, no. So much the worse. How divine it would be now, as we are rolling down into this ravine, if Von Moor himself were to spring out of the woods and cry—"

"HALT!"

A loud, coarse, angry voice cried it just as she spoke, and *bang!* went a gun close to the window, while the horses stopped, and the carriage, after being driven a few yards by its own momentum, came to a sudden halt, and in an instant was surrounded by a crowd of wild, bearded men, who carried carbines and wore all sorts of faded rags that looked as if they had been once on a time uniforms, of some sort or other.

Emilia's face had turned a little paler, and she began to tremble. Her ideal brigands and these actual ruffians were of different complexions.

Instead of a handsome youth in picturesque attire, who bowed before his fair captive and solicited her purse, came a stalwart bully with a red beard, who growled:

"Come, get out of that! We want your money and all your jewels, watches, *etcetera*, *etcetera*. Jump, if you don't want to be pulled out."

As he spoke, he flung open the door and leered at Emilia, who shrunk back in her own corner, while Frau Stock uttered a dismal scream.

"Ach, mein Gott in himmel! We shall all be murdered."

"Of course, if you don't get out," was the coarse reply. "Come, old woman."

As he spoke he grasped her by the wrists and dragged her out of the carriage amid the jeers

of the foot-pads, who seemed to think it fine fun to insult her.

Poor Frau Stock fell on her knees and with trembling fingers began to pull out her watch and purse, saying:

"Take all I have, good gentlemen, but don't kill me and don't hurt my young lady."

"Who is your young lady?" asked the principal thief, as he coolly pocketed the poor old lady's property.

"She is the *Fraulein* Emilia von Steinmark, sister to Graf Otto," faltered Frau Stock. "Oh, gentlemen, if you hurt her, her brother is a terrible man."

The robber laughed.

"Is he? So am I. Did you ever hear of Schinderhannes?"

Frau Stock stared at him with eyes dilated with terror:

"What! are you Schinderhannes, who robbed the—"

"The nunnery of Cologne and took the prettiest nuns to the mountains? Yes; I am he. But don't be afraid. You're safe from being carried off by Schinderhannes, or any one else."

And the robber laughed coarsely at his own coarse jest.

Then he turned to the carriage and observed:

"Come, we're wasting time, men. Now, *Fraulein* von Steinmark, we want you to get out. Shall I help you?"

The young lady was still in the corner of the carriage, where she had shrunk, her face white and drawn with fear as she listened to the coarse language of the brigand, but her voice was clear as a bell as she answered:

"Don't touch me, sir. Take what you want, but don't touch me, or my brother will avenge me bitterly on all your band."

Pale as she was, there was no flinching about her, and she eyed the brigand as steadily as if she felt not a particle of fear, however she might quake internally.

Schinderhannes looked at her and his eyes kindled as he looked.

"By the holy Evangelists," he growled, "you are worth all the nuns at Cologne when you look angry. Come out here. I won't hurt you."

But she remained in her corner, eying him in the same watchful way, and replied:

"Go away from the door then and take those wretches back. You shall have my watch and rings. Here they are."

As she spoke, she threw the articles mentioned out into the road, and the head thief was not slow to pick them up and appropriate them.

Then, however, he returned to the door of the carriage and said, in a tone which showed he was getting impatient:

"Come, get out! Your princess airs do not frighten me, *fraulein*. You must come out while my men search the carriage."

"Then fall back, and do not touch me," was her response, her eyes gleaming as she spoke.

Schinderhannes laughed and stepped back, and Emilia descended from the carriage with the air of a princess among slaves.

As she looked haughtily round her a buzz of astonishment and admiration burst from the robbers, who had hitherto kept back, allowing their chief to do all the talking.

The girl faced them as proudly as a queen and instinctively put her arms around poor Frau Stock, who on her part clung to the young lady she was supposed to protect as if she felt her only hope of safety lay there.

As for Schinderhannes, he and his men went through the carriage with a rapidity and thoroughness that told of long practice, and soon had skinned it of every article of value except the ladies' clothing and some books.

Then the robber chief turned to Emilia and said, with a rough attempt at politeness:

"You can resume your journey, *fraulein*, if you will at parting give me a kiss. I ask nothing more."

The hot blood rushed into Emilia's face and receded again, leaving her deadly pale, as she said with gleaming eyes:

"I warned you not to touch me."

Schinderhannes laughed.

"I tell you I must have a kiss and I will. Will you give it quietly or must I take it?"

The young lady ground her small white teeth together, as she looked at him with the glare of a hunted creature.

"Will you let me go on, coward?"

"No!" thundered he savagely, and was about making a rush toward her, when one of the robbers cried out:

"Gare a nous! Gendarmes!"

In a moment every robber was on the alert, looking up and down the road, when they heard the rapid gallop of horses, a crackling of branches, and into the road out of the forest dashed three horsemen, who bore a perfect arsenal of pistols in belts over velvet coats, and carried double-barreled carbines in their hands. All wore their hair long in the student fashion, and one of them was the handsomest youth Emilia had ever seen in her life.

Even amid all her terror and indignation at

*Look out! Police!

the coarse insults of the brigands, she could not help a thrill of admiration as she saw this youth gallop into the midst of the robbers, and shout:

"A bas vos armes! Sacre cochons, que faites vous ici?"

In all the sudden confusion the girl noticed that the robbers, except Schinderhannes, seemed to be French, and that the stranger was French too.

He seemed to know the robbers, and they him; for none attempted to hurt him, and it was in a sort of apologetic way that Schinderhannes said, in rough Alsatian French:

"We were only taking toll, Monsieur le Comte. The accursed Prussians must be met somehow."

The stranger frowned at the robber, and his handsome face looked as if the spirit of Lucifer were behind it, as he answered:

"Make me no excuses. But for me you would be hunted out of here by the students long ago. Did I not warn you to harm no ladies?"

Schinderhannes grumbled some indistinct form of excuse, but the stranger waved it aside.

"Put everything back into the carriage at once—everything, mind. And be quick. I will tell you when to strike and where."

Without another word of grumbling, Schinderhannes went back to the carriage and replaced in a heap on the cushions the stolen property, while the stranger threw his reins to a robber, sprung off his horse, and advanced to Emilia with a bow that was to her thinking the very impersonation of grace and politeness.

He doffed a broad black hat, from under which his dark curls flowed down on either side of an oval Greek face of olive complexion, with a deep carnation flush on the cheeks; and his dark magnetic eyes seemed to pierce her through as he said in the softest and most melodious of voices:

"*Fraulein*, I regret deeply that these men should have troubled you. Permit me to apologize and to lead you to your carriage."

Emilia, who had hitherto been as cool and collected as a man, now on a sudden began to flush and pale, as she faltered:

"And is it possible that you—you—are connected with these wretches?"

He smiled faintly, and then answered in a tone of singular sadness:

"Yes, they are wretches now. It is true. And yet, only a year ago they were the proudest men in Europe. *Fraulein*, seek to know no more, but permit me to lead you to your carriage and ask you to forget all this forever."

What was it made Emilia turn scarlet as he took her hand, and murmur:

"That is not so easy, monsieur."

They had been speaking French, which all educated Germans talk readily, and it was in French he said:

"For all that it must be done, if you wish ever to see me again. There is that in my past which no man can read but he who wrote it. Now let me take you to your carriage."

He offered his arm as he spoke and she took it with readiness; but all the unconquerable curiosity and romance of her nature prompted her next question, as she neared the carriage:

"Monsieur, will you not let me know the name of my deliverer from insult? Tell me, that I may tell my brother, the Graf von Steinmark, who must be your friend. You are not what you seem; you are no robber."

"You are right, *fraulein*; I am no robber," he answered, gravely. "Who I am you may know some day; but not now. Is the Graf von Steinmark, your brother, the one who studies at Bonn and fights so many duels?"

Emilia smiled and then sighed.

"Yes, I fear Otto is a sad scapegrace, like—"

"Like myself, you would say."

"I say nothing. But we love him with all his faults, just as we love Karl von Moor in the play. Do you know I shall call you Von Moor, if you will give me no other name."

"Willingly, *fraulein*, till we meet again."

will be Von Moor."

He placed her in the carriage as he spoke, kissed her hand with the most respectful deference, and was stepping back, when she poutingly said:

"And you do not even ask my name, Von Moor?"

"I would not presume to inquire," he replied gravely. "A lady's name is, like herself, sacred from intrusion by strangers. Farewell, *fraulein*."

"Well, then," she replied quickly in a low tone, "take it unasked. I am Emilia von Steinmark; but don't let Stock know I told you."

He was obliged to raise his hand to his lip on pretense of coughing to conceal a smile, for at that moment Frau Stock hurried up to the door, and said fretfully:

"I wish, Emilia, you would not be so familiar with strange gentlemen. We are much obliged to the noble gentleman for making the robbers give us back our money; but your brother, the

*Down with your arms! Accursed pigs, what are you doing here?

Herr Graf, is very particular about the proper introduction of all strangers."

The particular stranger in question smiled as if much amused, and retorted:

"Thanks, Frau Stock. The next time I see you in trouble I will not be so rude as to interfere, unless I have had a regular introduction."

Frau Stock looked puzzled, as if uncertain whether to think of the stranger as a jester or not, but he deliberately kissed Emilia's hand before the chaperone's face, and said as he retired:

"Sweet Emilia, farewell. Think of me at my best."

"Farewell, Von Moor," she answered with a bright smile; and then the postillions drove on, the Frau crying:

"Von Moor! Is that the wicked robber Von Moor that Schiller writes about, Emilia—really?"

And Emilia answered:

"Yes, Stockling, yes, that is my own Von Moor, just as I imagined him to be, brave, chivalrous, a hero!"

"A wretch, rather," grumbled Frau Stock. "But I forgive him. He let us go unhurt."

Emilia never answered. She lay back on the cushions again, dreaming with her eyes open.

CHAPTER IV.

SCHNEIDER'S.

SCHNEIDER'S beer garden at Heidelberg was a celebrated place in the year 1816, for all the "regular" duels of the students were fought there, averaging nearly twenty a week.

It was a large garden full of arbors, box hedges, white gravel walks and tiny grass plots, with tables set every where.

The clink of innumerable beer glasses mingled all day long and most evenings with the songs of canary birds hung up in cages on cherry trees.

Half of the garden was free to all the world; but a brick wall shut off the other part, save for a door in the center. When this door was not locked, it was guarded by a student, who only let in men with a certain countersign.

On the morning of the 16th July, the outer garden was empty at dawn, but as the sun rose knots of students came hurrying along the walks, made a brief halt at the gate in the brick wall, and were admitted to the inner sanctum of Schneider's.

There they found a garden very like the one outside, only neater; and in the midst of all was a square piece of gravel, rolled very hard and smooth, and about thirty feet every way.

All round this patch were rows of benches packed with students, smoking their long pipes and occasionally dropping a word to each other.

There was an air of solemnity and quiet decorum about them, very different from their noisy uproar in the old beer cellar, the previous night.

At one side of the patch was an arbor which shaded the entrance into a sort of workshop, full of swords, hung up, and in the midst of this workshop a fat man with a huge red mustache was calmly grinding swords on a stone turned by a band from a water-wheel not far off in the garden.

Everybody broke into a subdued buzz of talk presently, as a party of Red Caps came into the garden, headed by a young man over six feet in height, with a stalwart figure that told of immense power.

"Steinmark—that's Devilshend," whispered a White Cap to his neighbor. "Here come Reinhardt and Scheuermann."

Two tall White Caps came in, followed by a group of seconds, and the students began to offer bets to each other in whispers on events in the coming duel, as the combatants retired to the armory to dress.

Steinmark was evidently the favorite on account of his previous reputation; and his handsome but very grim face, with its cruel jaw and heavy blonde mustache, looked as if they had well earned him the title of Devilshend.

Presently out stalked the Prussian, his body and right arm covered by the heavy leathern guards used in student duels, his neck swathed in a big black silk neckcloth, his head alone bare.

His countenance looked sterner than usual as he scowled round him on the caps of the rival corps, and looked worst of all when Reinhardt and the White Caps, similarly arrayed, came in.

His two friends were in armor, not so heavy as his own, and a referee, who had been agreed on from the green corps, stood by.

Not a word seemed to be necessary, except the muttered caution on the part of the referee: "Get ready—Go!"

August Reinhardt and Graf von Steinmark each grasped a straight sword with a huge basket hilt, strode forward and toed a long line in the center of the dueling ground.

A moment later they had crossed the blades, sharp as razors, and the duel began.

Began, ay, and ended almost as soon.

Steinmark's blade rose like a flash of lightning, played round the other's head in a succes-

sion of swift cuts, Reinhardt parrying more and more nervously, and then—

Fweep!

A horrible sound, that of a blade that cut through flesh, bone and cartilage.

The blood spurted from the poor White Cap's face, as the keen schlager cut a broad ghastly gash that shore his nose in half and left a band of blood across each cheek near as far as the ears.

Reinhardt uttered an involuntary groan and fell back, while the Graf von Steinmark broke the etiquette of the ground by saying aloud:

"One White Cap whipped into his place. Now the next."

Instantly the second man rushed in and attacked Steinmark fiercely.

Being a strong resolute fellow, he was able to keep off Devilshend for nearly five minutes, but the enormous strength of the other enabled him to tire out poor Scheuermann by his heavy blows, and at last came that terrible back-handed slash in the face, which stretched the second Austrian on his back, disfigured for life.

Then Steinmark dropped his sword.

"Enough for one day," he cried. "I'll lay fifty thalers against five I can give that slash to any man in this garden or University, and my corps is the only one I may not fight."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth, as the surgeon was binding up the last victim's face, tying the severed arteries and drawing the lips of the horrible gash together with strips of plaster, when there was an unusual bustle at the gate of the inner garden, and presently in rushed a student of the Red Cap corps, who came hurriedly to Von Retz, Steinmark's second, and whispered something.

Retz started and ejaculated:

"Dead? All? Impossible!"

"I tell you I saw them all," was the low reply, as the student stared at the other with eyes dilated with horror. "He had laid them all in a row, dead, and every man belonged to our corps."

Steinmark heard and turned on him.

"What? Who's this? What's happened?"

"Karl Kapp, Ritter, Beutsch, and Von Meyer of our corps lie in the Death Court killed by the Count of St. George," was the answer.

"The Demon Duelist," was murmured by all the students, with an emotion that could not be stifled.

They were all brave men, for not one there but could come smiling up to face a razor-like schlager, and scars disfigured every face; but there was something in the name of St. George that seemed utterly to appal the boldest. They sat gazing at each other with blanched faces until Steinmark, who had been looking round with some contempt, exclaimed:

"What the devil's all this about. Who is this Count of St. George? Pardon me, my friends, but I don't know your people at Heidelberg. I'm a Bonn man myself. Who is this terrible Count of St. George? What has he done to day? Who's dead?"

The students began to look at the huge figure of this stalwart and imperious young man, and whisper to each other.

Then said Von Retz, who seemed to be cooler than the rest:

"The Count of St. George is a Frenchman. No one knows whence he comes; but since he has been here he has killed a number of our men."

"Whose men?" interrupted Steinmark sharply.

"Red Caps all. They say he has sworn to drive every Prussian from Heidelberg. He fences only a *Poutrance* with the small-sword or saber, and he seems to have done more mischief to-day. How came it, Berger?"

"It happened last night after you had gone," answered Berger in a low voice. "Four of our men had shaken hands on keeping his table, and that he should fight them all, but it was no use. He challenged the whole and he has but just fled across the frontier, leaving them all behind him, dead as stones."

Steinmark began to look, for the first time since he had entered the dueling ground, interested. He began to peel off his cumbersome leathern armor, and asked thoughtfully:

"How do you say this person fences?"

"Without armor, in shirt and trowsers," was the reply.

Steinmark laughed a short and rather exultant laugh.

"Good! I am tired of this nose-cutting business. It grows monotonous. I must see Monsieur St. George. I have never found a Frenchman who could handle a saber with me."

There was an instant smiling and laying of heads together among the students at this promise.

The constant and unceasing victories of the Demon Duelist had caused a sort of morbid panic even among the hot-headed students of Heidelberg, and the bold overmastering spirit of this stranger from Bonn seemed to have a strengthening effect on them, coupled with his evidently gigantic strength and skill with the sword.

"Henceforth," said Steinmark, as he looked around, "I fight no German, be he white, green,

blue or yellow in his cap, let him insult me as he may, till I have crossed swords with this insolent Frenchman. Who will join me in this vow?"

"I! I! I!" came from every voice in eager tones. Steinmark's face brightened; the fierce look left it, and he extended both hands, crying:

"Enough! Let us forget Prussia, Austria, Bavaria and Baden. We are all Germans. Let us make a League of Steel."

The name seemed to catch the wild fancy of the students.

"A League of Steel!" they repeated; and Steinmark caught up a schlager and held it aloft.

"Swords, swords!" he cried. "No white, no red, no corps at all, but a League of Steel, a Students' League, to hunt down this Demon Duelist, wherever we find him! Who'll swear?"

There was a rush made to the armory, and a hundred swords were gleaming in the air round the lofty head of Steinmark, who cried:

"Repeat after me: We swear—"

"We swear," repeated the students, in chorus.

"On our honor as students, on our faith as Germans, on our crossed swords, and on the cross of our holy religion, by all the powers of heaven and hell, that we will drive St. George from our midst, and that to preserve his own life he must kill one and all of us. That if one dies the other shall take his place, and that we never will rest till we have avenged the blood of our slain comrades. We swear it on sword and cross."

The oath of the League of Steel was rolled solemnly forth on the morning air, and even the two wounded men, who had been bandaged by the doctors and were hardly able to stand up, grasped hands cordially with their late antagonist, crossed swords with him, and faithfully repeated the oath after him in weak tones.

Then Steinmark looked round again. "Who will be your leader?"

"Thou! thou!" cried all.

He smiled proudly.

"I will lead you to victory. My race rode over the French at Waterloo, and I fear none of them. Listen! You will keep this league secret and only recognize each other by the sign of the cross on the left hip where the sword hangs. The answering sign will be to make a cross on the closed lips, to signify silence. The words will be 'Steinmark' and 'St. George,' for challenger and challenged. That is all we need. Now where is this count? Is he yet in Heidelberg?"

Berger answered:

"Nay, he has gone away to Darmstadt or Frankfurt. We must wait till he comes back."

"Not so," said Steinmark. "He has gone by the forest road. Let us follow him, comrades, and show him that the best man in France cannot beat all Germany. He has gone to join Schinderhannes, the robber, and we can kill two birds with one stone."

CHAPTER V.

THE STUDENTS' PATROL.

THE carriage of Fraulein von Steinmark proceeded rapidly and without further molestation after its fair owner's little adventure with the robbers, till the road had descended into the valley of the Rhine and entered a wild and unfrequented part of the forest, when the horses slackened their pace again, and soon were only progressing at a walk.

Finally this too stopped, and Frau Stock began to cry.

"Oh, *fraulein*, we are undone. Here are certainly more robbers. Why did we come this way? We shall be killed all over again."

Emilia pretended to deride her companion's fears, but felt uneasy. It is nothing, Stock, nothing. The road is getting sandy and the horses are tired, that is all."

She put her head out of the window and found that the road was, as she had said, deep and sandy; but that was not the apparent cause of stoppage, for the horses were fidgeting to start, and it was the postillions who had pulled them up, and now sat looking along the road and conversing in low tones.

Emilia's eyes followed theirs and she saw, coming up the road, a crowd of men, the glitter of whose arms announced that they were probably soldiers of some sort.

She called out to the postillions:

"What is the matter? Why do you not go on?"

The boy touched his cap.

"Gracious *fraulein*, we don't want to be halted by a bullet the second time. The gentlemen coming have the look of students on a frolic, and those gentry stand no nonsense."

"Students!" she repeated. "Why I thought the professors kept them all within the town."

The postillion touched his cap again.

"The noble gentlemen do much as they please, gracious *fraulein*. They rob hen-roosts, kiss the peasant girls, and keep the country lively with their antics, till they have a fit of virtue, and then they organize patrols and pretend to be police."

"And is that a patrol coming?" she asked,

smiling, for she felt no alarm now she heard they were students.

"Probably, gracious *fraulein*. Yes, it must be, for they are not singing."

As he spoke the on-coming party had arrived within about a hundred yards, when they heard a loud voice shout in German:

"Come on, postillions. We won't hurt you. Hurry up."

The postillions obeyed readily, and the carriage moved on till it stopped in the midst of a company of young men, wearing long hair, velvet coats and white caps, among whom Emilia recognized the tall form of her own brother, who still had on his red cap and seemed to be a sort of chief among the rest.

Every student carried a short yager rifle with powder-horn and pouch, and every one wore a sword besides. Behind the white capped company she could see another with green head coverings, and the whole road seemed to be full behind them, for several hundred students were out that day.

Steinmark called to the postillions. "Whom have you inside?"

His sister had hid herself, smiling, behind the side of the carriage, as soon as she saw him; and the students seemed to be in perfect discipline, for none of them offered to advance out of their ranks to look inside.

The postillion touched his cap.

"Gracious Herr, two ladies from Darmstadt, going to Baden."

"Have you been stopped?"

"No, gracious Herr."

The postillion lied with a readiness that showed he must have been cautioned on that point by the late robbers, and felt afraid to disobey.

Fran Stock heard him and started to look out, when Emilia pinched her arm, whispering:

"Be quiet, Stock. Be quiet, I say."

"But, gracious *fraulein*, the man is telling a wicked story. I must tell the Herr Graf. I heard his voice."

"Be quiet, I say," whispered Emilia. "If you say a word I'll never forgive you, Stock. They did not hurt us—"

"Didn't they? Look at my wrists, all black and blue," grumbled Frau Stock indignantly. "I declare it's a shame, gracious *fraulein*—"

But she said no more, for Emilia had a will not unlike her brother's, and Frau Stock was afraid of it.

While they held their whispered dispute in the carriage, Steinmark continued his talk to the postillion.

"Not stopped, say you? Then have you seen no robbers in the forest?"

"None, gracious Herr."

"Then who put that bullet through your hat?" asked Steinmark sternly. "I can see the hole here."

The postillion was confused.

"Oh, nothing, noble Herr. It's a hole I cut with a knife to cool my head."

"Knives don't cut round holes like that. You've been stopped, and I know it. Schinderhannes has left this part of the forest, and he's not the man to let a carriage go by. Why won't you tell?"

"Ach Gott! noble Herr, how can I say anything?" asked the boy in a tone of remonstrance. "I have to go back to the post house to-night, and if I tell, they're sure to hear of it. And where would my back be to-morrow?"

Steinmark nodded his head.

"I see. You have been stopped. I must ask the ladies."

He came to the side of the carriage, removed his cap with a bow of the most profound respect, and began:

"Gracious ladies, pardon my visit, but I wish to inquire if— Ach Gott! Emilia, is it thou indeed?"

He broke off in extreme astonishment as his sister looked smilingly out.

Every student had his cap in his hand in a moment, and was gazing with an air of reverential homage at the beautiful face in the carriage window, for the spirit of medieval chivalry is still strong among German students and they worship women of the noble classes afar off.

But Otto Von Steinmark was too familiar with the face of his own sister to be thus astonished. Had it been some one else's sister, it might have been different.

He immediately embraced her with great affection, and anxiously exclaimed:

"Gracious Heavens, Emilia, had I known thou wert in the forest, I should have been half dead with anxiety! And did Schinderhannes meet thee on the road?"

"Do I look as if I had been stopped?" she asked lightly. "Poor Stock fell asleep and had a horrible dream about Karl Von Moor, and fancies we were robbed, but you see we had no harm."

He looked at her in amazement.

"Art thou sure, Emilia? They say this Schinderhannes is a deep rogue, and we had made up our own minds to clear the forest of his company before we could do something else on which we had set our hearts."

"And now you'd better march right back again," she retorted. "How silly you all look

with those guns. Leave them to the soldiers, Otto."

Otto seemed to be doubtful in his mind, for he looked at her narrowly in a way that made her change color, and at last said:

"Emilia, this carriage was stopped, and you have some reason for not saying so. Tell me one thing. Were you insulted or hurt? Did any man put his hand on you?"

In a moment her face became crimson.

"What do you mean, Otto? How dare you ask such a thing? As if I would permit—"

"Enough," he said, quietly, waving his hand. "I can trust our honor to my sister's keeping, I think. But if ever—"

He paused, frowned, turned on his heel, strode away, then turned back and asked in an ordinary tone:

"Where are you traveling now?"

"To Baden, to the springs, Otto. I was so tired of Darmstadt that I made Stock pack up, and we ran away all in a hurry. I must see Stephanie. She has been asking me to come ever since we both left Madame de Campan's."

Madame de Campan's was the ultra fashionable ladies' school of the empire, its owner having been once maid-of-honor to Marie Antoinette.

Otto frowned and grumbled:

"Stephanie von Werden is a false French jilt, and I hope her husband will never be sorry he married her. I wish you were going anywhere else, Emilia. Your position—"

"You mean that as I am an heiress and independent I ought to keep shut up in a nunnery, while you do just as you please, Otto," she retorted saucily. "Thanks, my brother, but I have quite a liking for all the French and for Stephanie in particular. Will you let us go on now, or do these gentlemen intend to turn comrades of this Schinderhannes you speak of?"

Otto von Steinmark drew back, looking offended. Used to men, he was no match for his sister when she chose to measure wits with him.

"If you will stay in Baden till the autumn I will come there," he said, as a last overture of peace, as the carriage started off, but she shook her head and called back:

"I cannot tell where I shall be then. Good-by, Otto."

The postillions cracked their whips, the students drew back, bare-headed, and Emilia von Steinmark was carried away toward Heidelberg, while Otto, shaking his head, grumbled to himself:

"Now what the deuce made her deny that she had met the robbers, when I know the woods are full of them?"

One of the White Caps, the young Baron Leopold von Bredow, observed:

"I am told, Herr Graf, that Schinderhannes is not the chief of these robbers. There is another, a Frenchman, who is only heard of at intervals, and whom nobody knows. They say he never robs any but men, and that only ladies are allowed to see his face. And the singular part is that none of them will ever inform about him. Probably he is a handsome fellow."

Steinmark frowned thoughtfully as he walked on; for the students had resumed their march; and presently he said, half to himself:

"Then they are in these woods after all, most likely."

Bredow nodded.

"Probably; and what is more, I am all but convinced most of them are French."

"Indeed? What makes you think so?"

"Well, you see, I once had to run for it through the back road, after an affair in which I laid out my man; and I was stopped by five of these gentry, who cross-examined me and let me go when they heard my opponent was a Prussian—excuse me, Herr Graf, but he forced the quarrel on me—and then they all laughed and said I was a friend of theirs, and could go. And I noticed that they all talked bad Alsatian German, and that two wore what had once been a French uniform."

"Humph!" observed Devilshead grimly. "And we Germans are fools enough to fight each other for those fellows' profit. It serves us right, Bredow. While we waste our blood in corps duels, Germany is disgraced by these brigands, and we are split up into little States, too feeble to put them down. Let us put an end to this. We at least will never break from our brotherhood of steel."

They marched on after this in silence for some miles, till the Prussian observed:

"Come, gentlemen, if there are robbers in this wood we shall never catch them this way. Spread out on either side and let us scour the forest as we go. If St. George have fled to Schinderhannes, we shall find him hidden somewhere."

After the Napoleonic wars all Germans were more or less soldiers, and many among the students there had seen service as boys in the last great campaigns of Leipzig, Bautzen and Waterloo. Therefore it was with very commendable order that the League of Steel dispersed itself into a long line of beaters and went forward through the wild pine forest.

As they advanced, hares and grouse got up be-

fore them and scudded away, and it was a sore temptation for the wild students to try a shot, but they controlled their sporting instincts within the bounds of discipline, and pretty soon had disappeared entirely from the road, and were lost in the depths of the forest. A small party kept in sight of the highway, however, and Bredow, who was with them, presently said:

"Hist! I hear a carriage. Certainly it is strange. Two in one day. And not a vehicle has come through before, without being robbed, for a week."

Sure enough, the rattle of wheels and the trotting of horses was audible, and presently a traveling carriage rolled round a turn of the road, drawn by four post-horses.

Bredow and his companions came out into the road and signaled the postillions to halt, which they did with remarkable promptness, when the young student asked:

"Have you been stopped?"

"Ach Gott, no; for we showed them our heels before," answered the boy, who grinned delightedly as he saw the student dress. "You are the patrol, gentlemen. Thank God you're out, for it is needed; what with Schinderhannes and his men. They are on, about a mile in front, and put three bullets into our carriage."

"Who is inside?" asked Bredow.

"A lady, gracious Herr."

"A lady?" echoed Bredow. "Gott in Himmel, are all the women crazy, to-day? This is the second. I must ask her a question."

He took off his cap and advanced to the window with the most reverential bow, saying insinuatingly:

"Will the gracious lady pardon the intrusion? I belong to the students' patrol, and we are going to clear the woods of the brigands that infest it. Will the gracious lady tell us how many robbers she observed when they tried to stop her?"

Then he dropped his cap in the excess of his astonishment and admiration, for the most beautiful lady he had ever seen looked out of the window and said, in French:

"I talk no German, monsieur. What do you demand, if you please?"

A dark, rich face, with coral lips, black eyes, pearly teeth, and the most shining, jetty curls Bredow had ever dreamed of. The Austrian fell dead in love on the spot; blushed, stammered, and forgot so much of his French that he could hardly frame his question properly.

The lady smiled bewitchingly, and answered his inquiry:

"About fifty, monsieur. Good luck to you, and may you have a fine time in clearing the woods. Adieu."

She fell back, and the carriage drove off, leaving Bredow hopelessly in love.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COUNTESS.

LATE that evening the students' patrol returned empty-handed, having seen and heard nothing of any robbers in the forest beyond Bredow's information and with them came no less than nine traveling carriages that had been waiting on the Darmstadt side at the post-house, not daring to cross the dangerous belt of country.

There Steinmark learned how it was that his sister had come through when male travelers had feared to pass.

"The *fraulein* said that she had read all about one Karl von Moor, a great robber, in a book by a certain Schiller," explained the landlord; "and she insisted that he never harmed ladies. So what could I do, excellency, but let her have horses, when indeed they were eating their heads off?"

"But who was the second lady?" asked Bredow, who was still dreaming of the beautiful unknown he had met.

"What lady, gracious Herr? There has only been one lady passed to-day."

"Nay, I'll swear there was a second," retorted the Austrian. "I saw her myself, a very dark, beautiful lady, who looked Spanish or French."

"Then she must have come on the road from Vienna. It cuts in below here, gracious Herr. No such lady has passed here to-day."

And Bredow was fain to be content with this scrap of news, and became absent minded all the rest of the day, till they were returning home, when he developed a certain extravagant gayety that induced Steinmark to growl, in his most sour manner:

"What the deuce ails you, comrade? One might think you were in love."

Bredow flushed crimson from his downy white mustache to his light flaxen curls, and answered:

"And if I be, what shame, comrade! The League of Steel does not forbid it."

"Not unless she be a French woman," answered Steinmark gruffly. "That accursed race will never forgive us for saving Europe at Waterloo, and I believe in keeping them down."

Bredow looked hurt and a little shocked at his companion.

"Nay, you forget that an Austrian princess was Empress of France, and that Napoleon's

son is Duke of Reichstadt. We Austrians cannot hate them as you do, Steinmark."

Devilshead looked his grimmest as he retorted: "They never hurt you as they did us. Eternal perdition seize every man, woman and child in France! I hate them all, and I want them to hate me too, curse them."

Bredow shrugged his shoulders and made no answer. In truth the antipathy between Prussia and France was as fierce then as it had been in the days of Frederick the Great after Rossbach, and as it is to-day after Sedan.

The French had ridden rough-shod over Prussia after Jena, and it was Prussians who had harried France after Leipsic and Waterloo. Austria had suffered from France, but had always kept on better terms, thanks to former matrimonial alliances.

The students marched into Heidelberg and dispersed rather gloomily to their quarters. They had taken their tramp for nothing; the Demon Duelist had escaped, and as for Schinderhannes, he too was nowhere to be found.

Steinmark called together the chiefs of the corps and told them:

"We must go to work another way. They are alarmed when we all go out, and will keep out of sight for a time. Let them grow careless. I will go to Baden after my sister, and return secretly. In the meantime let small patrols go out, only at night, and try to find out where these scoundrels hide. I will be back in five days, and we will all go together at night. Keep my return a secret from the comrades, or it will leak outside. We have traitors among us, somewhere."

The chiefs promised to execute his orders faithfully; for they were all anxious to be rid of St. George, and the excitement of the chase was dear to their romantic souls.

Steinmark packed up his trunk and two sword-cases, with a box of pistols, took a "post-wagon" with a pair of horses, and was soon fast asleep in the little vehicle, which only held two persons, as he bowed along on the post-road to Baden.

He traveled all night and next day, drawing up in the afternoon at the Hotel du Nord, then the principal establishment in Baden, where he dismounted with a growl, saying:

"Hotel du Nord—of course French. And not a decent German house in the place, or I'd go to it. Waiters all French too—deuce take it. If the Germans could only cook, I'd never set foot in a French house."

But as Steinmark, being a young man of independent fortune—one of those titled orphans who obtain little pity for having no parents, because they have all the parents' money—was a high liver, he could not stand German cooks, and contented himself with cursing all the French waiters in the hotel in German, while he took his dinner.

After that he dressed for the evening, and sallied forth to pay a surprise visit to Madame von Werder's house, where he knew his sister was stopping.

Madame von Werder had once been Stephanie de la Riviere, a French heiress, in the days when France was head of Europe—only eight years before—and when a Prussian was nobody.

In those days Steinmark—then a lad of eighteen—had fallen in love with her, when she came from school on a visit to his father's with Emilia.

He was eighteen, Stephanie was only sixteen and Emilia was a child of eleven; but Stephanie was already a confirmed flirt, and turned the heart of the gawky cadet upside down in a single interview.

And when a year later, she coolly married the Bavarian Count von Werder, a general in Napoleon's service, old enough to be her father, Steinmark became a woman-hater. Two years later again, he found relief in the great German rising against France, and glutted his hatred for Stephanie's slight on every Frenchman he could find.

Then came Leipsic, the fall of Paris, and his father was killed in the final action of Montmirail. Young Steinmark found himself at twenty-five a man of riches, with a neglected education and all the world before him to choose from.

It was to the credit of his mind that he was not ashamed to go to school again in the form of university; but it was his soldier life of the past that made him so reckless and full of quarrels that he had earned the name of Devilshead.

And yet now he was going to Stephanie's house; the residence of the woman he had idolized and hated successively, but whom he had never been able to forget since she married that gouty old general.

Steinmark's heart beat faster than its wont as he drove to Madame von Werder's house, and found it all lighted up, while music was sounding from the open windows on the summer air.

"She has a party," he muttered. "It is better so. I should not like to meet her all alone, even now—Pshaw! it's eight years ago. What a fool you must be, Devilshead—Devilshead indeed! Calf'shead and Sheepshead better call thee. Positively I am shaking as if I had the fever."

And, indeed, this big grenadier was beginning to find out that love is a thing not so easily controlled. He had fancied it all gone, and here he was, trembling like a school-girl at her first ball.

He gave a great gulp, raised the knocker, and was instantly confronted by a *chasseur** as big as himself, with a black mustache that shamed his best efforts.

"Has monsieur a card?" asked the big *chasseur* in French, with an air of polite suspicion. "Madame receives only by card of invitation, to-night."

Steinmark frowned. The forbidding air of the French *chasseur* roused his combativeness, and he was determined not to be bluffed off.

"Take my card to Frau von Werder," he said, sternly, in his most guttural German. "I am the Graf von Steinmark, do you hear, stupid? an old friend of the family."

The *chasseur* evidently knew German—in fact he was Alsatian and talked either indifferently—for he backed into the hall, bowing.

"Pardon, monsieur, I did not know. Mademoiselle von Steinmark's brother, I presume. Mademoiselle will be delighted to see monsieur."

"Talk German, man," said the Prussian with supreme disgust. "I hate the French language as much as the French. Announce me."

The *chasseur* turned crimson to the roots of his mustache, but made no remark, and preceded his guest to the door of a huge drawing-room full of dancers, who were just breaking up from a quadrille. Then he announced stentorally:

"Graf von Steinmark!"

There was a slight bustle in the room and a lady, still young and quite pretty, but too plump for anything like ideal beauty, hurried to the door, seized both Steinmark's hands and cried out:

"Monsieur le Comte, is it you? Why it is indeed our dear boy Otto, just the same as ever! I should have known you anywhere."

And Otto von Steinmark could only stare in surprise, and look so very much puzzled that she burst out laughing and called out:

"Emilie, Emilie, your brother does not know me—actually. What a good joke!"

Then, as Emilia came up, looking puzzled and a little annoyed at the surprise visit, the plump lady continued in a half whisper:

"Yes, *cher* Otto, it is I—the Stephanie you swore was so cruel. Have I not improved, Otto? I am not cruel now."

And the scales fell from Otto's eyes as if by a revelation. It was Stephanie!

The airy, fairy Stephanie of old, a very sylph with a suspicion of the skinny about her neck, had become a plump matronly woman, who did not fascinate him in the least, and it was with perfect coolness and a shade of amusement that he paid his compliments and asked after General von Werder.

"My husband? oh! gout as usual. I rarely see the general except to pay him a visit in the morning and ask after his health. But come, Otto, you dance, of course?"

"I fear not, Steph—pardon—I mean madame."

"Oh, nonsense, Otto, call me Stephanie, or I shall think you have never yet forgiven me."

"I do, to-night," he said smiling; and the plump Stephanie did not know how seriously he meant it.

"Then as you don't dance, I must introduce you to my particular friend the Countess of St. George. She too never dances, but converses in the most charming manner."

Steinmark had started at the name and Stephanie added:

"How do you know her?"

"No, no, Stephanie. But I have heard the name."

"Oh yes," chattered Stephanie, as she led him down through the long saloon, "you probably mean the count her brother. He is a terrible fellow and all the ladies in Baden are in love with him when he comes here."

"Is he here to-night?"

"No, unfortunately. He came here last night with Diane in a tremendous hurry but went away to-day. One rarely or never sees them together. In fact I never did and know of none who have. They are so much alike, though, one might easily know they were twins."

"Then how—"

"Is she countess and married to the same name? Easy enough. Their name was originally De Mauprat and Diane married Monsieur de St. George, at the same time I married Von Werder. He was general of division or a lieutenant-general, I forget which, and had been promised his marshal's baton when he was killed, just before the surrender of Paris, and Diane is his widow. She is, the count says, inconsolable, but I fancy that will not last long when the proper person comes along. Now, Otto, here she is. Be civil, you rough Prussian bear. Remember she has suffered a good deal from your people."

*Ultra rich and fashionable people in Europe generally have, besides footmen, etc., a big, handsome fellow, in a sort of hussar dress, all over gold embroidery, and this gorgeous personage is called a *chasseur*, when in reality he is only a sort of resplendent head-waiter.

As she whispered the last words they stopped before a recess in the end of the saloon, where stood quite a little crowd of diplomats and black coats clustered around the most brilliant vision of female beauty Otto had ever seen.

He recognized Bredow's *inamorata* in an instant, from the description.

There were the large luminous eyes, the red lips, pearly teeth, dark, rich complexion, jetty hair, with a coronet of diamonds. Diane de St. George, in black velvet, only worn by women of forty, as a general thing, looked perfectly regal as she toyed with a crimson fan in a haughtily languid manner, and dropped little biting sarcasms among her admirers, who seemed to enjoy being snubbed.

She greeted Stephanie with a smile as she presented Otto, and was so condescending as to say:

"Monsieur is welcome. He has a charming sister, and probably has some of her brains. Oh, Stephanie, how few men can talk, outside of our own France."

"I hardly hope to earn any laurels at talking, Madame la Comtesse," said Steinmark, feeling strangely uneasy beneath the dark eyes of the lady, which seemed to pierce him through and through.

"Ah, possibly you think so," she returned.

"What do you prefer?"

Steinmark smiled as he said:

"A good fight; but that's all over now. We shall have a long peace, I fear."

Diane looked at him in the same searching, imperious manner with which she seemed to be in the habit of putting down bores of all sorts.

"Perhaps not," she said. "The Little Corporal came with the violets two years ago, you know, and he may come again. St. Helena and Elba are both islands."

"Then we shall have to put him in the place whence no man escapes," retorted Steinmark.

"We could have done it before."

"You?" she repeated, scornfully. "You mean all Europe, and French traitors like Bernadotte to help them."

He felt nettled, but kept his temper.

"I yield, madame. One cannot argue about war with a lady."

CHAPTER VII.

ARMED NEUTRALITY.

THE Countess of St. George seemed to be a woman of singular love for, or spirit of contradiction; for she instantly retorted:

"Perhaps you think so, but I have known women who could command armies as well as a man. What think you of Semiramis, Elizabeth, Christina of Sweden, Catherine of Russia? Bah! it is not always the men that do the fighting so well. Your very Queen of Prussia had more courage than her craven husband, after Jena."

He smiled again; for the lady was looking angry, and he felt that his remark had nettled her.

"I meant no offense," he said more mildly. "You are French; I Prussian. We cannot agree about war, and so I dare not go on talking, for fear of hurting your feelings."

He had grown, suddenly, considerate of French feelings, this French-hater, and remembered Stephanie's warning:

"She has suffered."

But it is to be feared that if the Countess of St. George had squinted or had the small-pox, or even lost a few teeth, he might not have cared much for her feelings.

She looked at him more mildly.

"Hurting my feelings. Can a Prussian care for a Frenchwoman's feelings?"

"Indeed," he answered in a low and earnest tone, "I feel at this moment as if I cared too much for my own sake; but Stephanie had told me of your cruel loss, and I do not wonder at your bitterness. Forgive me."

The dark eyes of the haughty lady became strangely luminous as the tears started unbidden, and she hastily said:

"There, there. Let us talk of other things. I have heard of you before."

"Indeed, madame? No good, I fear."

She gave her head a little haughty toss that became her usual queenly airs. Her late admirers had slowly fallen back, in some awe of the big stately Prussian count; for most of them were either French or Bavarians; and these two seemed to be in some sort on a confidential footing.

"No good, of course," she said. "What good could I hear of a Prussian? No, but they say, monsieur, that you are so fond of fighting, you fight your own countrymen."

Her tone was keen and sarcastic, and Steinmark felt confused for the first time in their interview. He even turned red as he blurted out:

"It is true, madame, and I am sorry for it, but I shall never do it again."

"Why not?" she asked, so sharply and suddenly that even Steinmark's iron nerves failed him a moment and he started—at which Diane smiled in a satisfied sort of way.

"Because—oh never mind that—but, madame, it seems to me that you are hardly the person to cast stones at me for duels, when—"

"When my brother fights as many," she

finished for him. "It is true, monsieur, but he has a cause—you none. There is the difference."

"Why, what cause has the Count of St. George to kill Prussians, who never offended him, in cold blood?" he asked amazedly.

Diane curled her lip.

"I am the cause," she said quietly.

"You!"

"Yes, I; it is a long story."

Steinmark deliberately seated himself uninvited on the sofa by the lady, who half made room for him, in a rather unwilling manner.

The fact was that the big Prussian, at twenty-six, developed into a splendid man, was a very different being from the gawky cadet whom Stephanie de la Riviere had twisted round her white finger eight years before.

He had become a giant physically and his mind had improved proportionately, while his audacity had become extreme, from many triumphs on the ground and at examinations.

"This is a stupid gathering," he said coolly. "I have plenty of time. Tell me the story, countess."

Diane drew slightly away from him, and cast a strange glance at the bold face of the Graf.

"Perhaps you might not like to hear it all," she said. "Perhaps I might not care to tell it all to a Prussian."

"Forget I am a Prussian for an hour, and tell me the story. It may do me good. Perhaps I have been too hard on you French."

Again she cast that peculiar look at him from under half closed lids that reminded him; he knew not how, of a wild beast hiding in a covert, and said in her rich deep tones:

"What an admission! Perhaps you may. But you are no worse than the rest. Ah! the emperor was a fool to give back your kingdom after Jena. He ought to have known that a foe spared is two foes in the day of need."

Steinmark gave her back her look with his wide open gray eyes and his own bold stare.

"I am waiting for the story, countess," he said composedly.

She hesitated slightly. It was a new thing to her to find a man who was not afraid of her, and she seemed to have become morbid in her scorn.

At last she shrugged her shoulders and said, abruptly:

"Well, I will tell you. At least you are a man who has fought openly. Where did you serve, count?"

"In the Third Cuirassiers," he replied, with a touch of pride. "Seidlitz's old regiment, you know."

"I know. Then you were not in the hussars? you did no foraging duty? you were not put on outpost?"

"Very seldom," he answered, a little surprised to find a lady conversant with the details of army life. "Why do you ask?"

"You will know when I have done. Eight years ago, monsieur, when you were in love with Stephanie de la Riviere—no, don't look so ashamed of it. It was the best thing you ever did in your life. It showed you had a heart—Eight years ago I was a poor girl and an orphan. My father was a soldier of the Guard—the Old Guard—and he was killed at Jena."

Her voice took a certain accent of indescribably mournful pride, as she spoke of the Old Guard, and her eyes grew misty.

"Yes; the Old Guard that died at Waterloo. Oh, my father, I am glad that you never saw that day! Well, monsieur, he was an officer, but one of a class that never rise to any higher rank. He was Maitre d'Armes of the Mamelukes of the Guard."

Steinmark's face lighted up.

"Why that was the great—"

"St. George," she replied. "You are right. He was the greatest master the world ever saw. Yet he died without a chance for his life, shot through the heart, and I was left alone in the world."

"But Stephanie told me—"

"That my maiden name was De Mauprat, and that I am the widow of Count St. George? It is true, St. George was but my father by adoption. My father was a Royalist, guillotined in the Reign of Terror, and my only mother now, is France. It was St. George who took Dion and me from the prison of the Temple and brought us up as his own, with his son Alexandre. It was Alexandre I married after his father's death, and he was made a general of division on the same field where his father fell."

"He must have been a good officer to earn promotion so young," observed Steinmark, thoughtfully. "He was how old, countess?"

"Twenty-four, and I sixteen," she said, in a musing sort of way. "Yesterday was his birthday."

"Yesterday?"

"Yes. His brother Dion kept it in Heidelberg, I hear."

She gave a short scornful laugh under her breath, which made even the iron Steinmark shudder slightly, but she did not seem to notice it.

"Ay, yesterday, the 16th of July, day of disaster to all our house, and henceforth day of vengeance."

There was a somber energy in her tones as she pronounced the word "Vengeance," that sounded peculiarly unnatural in that gay saloon of froth and flutter; but Steinmark had grown too curious to interrupt her, and he waited till she went on musingly:

"The 16th of July. My father and mother were guillotined that day, in the year '93, when I was one year old. On that day I was married. On that day I was widowed. On that day the empire fell to ruin, after Waterloo. Do you wonder I hate the day?"

She was silent so long that he at last ventured to say:

"But, countess, that was but the fortune of war. I cannot see why you should be so bitter against us Prussians, and take pride in the wholesale murders of one who has gained the name of—"

"The Demon Duelist," she interrupted, her eyes glowing with a light that savored strongly of mental disturbance, if not monomania. "Ay, ay, they are all afraid of the Demon Duelist, when they would laugh at the tears of Diane, weeping for her murdered husband. Murders, you say! Can all the duels that were ever fought equal in cruelty the deliberate shooting down of an unarmed prisoner?"

"A prisoner?" he echoed. "Who did it?"

"Who did it? You Prussians of course. But why speak of this to you, monsieur? You may have been one of them. Why stay here and talk to me when there are plenty of your pretty German maids dying to dance with Graf von Steinmark, who belongs to the victorious nation? And poor France is nothing now. Go, monsieur, go, I am tired of you."

She struck him petulantly with her fan, this strange wayward being, and laughed in her soft velvet tones as she said:

"How the man stares! I invented it all. My brother the count is a sad scamp, they say; but I hope you will like him, when you meet. Apropos, count, they tell me you call yourself a fencer."

There was a peculiar sneer in her tones now that nettled Steinmark to the quick. This strange woman had so many moods that he found himself losing all his confidence as their queer interview progressed, and alternately hated, admired, and was fascinated by her in a breath.

It was this confusion of mind that made him say what he never would have said to any other woman, in a rather boasting tone:

"Call myself? No. But a good many call me so, and I never met a French *maitre d'armes* could beat me five points out of seven."

"Indeed," she said, in a lazy sort of way, and surveying him with the cold criticism of a jockey looking at a horse's points before buying. "I should hardly have thought it. You look too clumsy to be good for much. Do you know I like fencing myself?"

"You?" he exclaimed, amazedly.

She smiled in the same provoking way.

"Oh, yes. My father taught me, and my husband and I fenced constantly; for he had no one else to exercise with after he was a general. It was below his dignity, you know. I go to the *Salle d'Armes* every morning here, and I have not found a man can touch me, yet. I don't believe you could."

Steinmark felt as if all his blood were dancing with impatience at the way this lady was laughing at him.

At that moment he hated her.

"Well, if you like—if you are not joking—" he said, with much hidden exasperation.

"I am not, indeed," she answered. "Meet me at the *Salle d'Armes* at ten."

CHAPTER VIII.

A FENCING MATCH.

STEINMARK went to bed in the Hotel du Nord that night with his head in a whirl.

He could not forget this singular lady, so beautiful and so eccentric, who seemed to charm and exasperate him at one and the same time.

He had taken her down to supper; they had talked of art, literature, music, politics; agreeing in some things and quarreling on others with a vehemence that made them seem like old friends or relatives; but never separating for most of the evening.

When Madame von Werder came up to take her friend away to the piano to sing for the company, Steinmark felt as if his once idolized Stephanie were a horrible bore, and he stood tugging at his mustache and looking as grim as only Devilshead could look, to see the crowd of people that came clustering around the countess at the instrument.

But when she sung he ceased to pull at his mustache, and before he knew it his mouth had half opened in intense eagerness and attention, while, after a verse or two, the tears rushed unbidden to his usually steely, cruel-looking eyes, and Steinmark—Devilshead—was struggling with a sob and in danger of breaking down.

For the countess had the most singularly pathetic singing voice—a deep rich contralto—he had ever heard, and she sung that most pathetic of French soldier songs:

"Te Souviens Tu?" [Dost Thou Remember?]

A little song, forgotten nowadays, in which an old captain and a veteran of the Old Guard talk over the glories of France under Napoleon and recall to each other the splendid memories of the past, destined to end in the exile of St. Helena.

And Steinmark the French-hater found himself wiping away a stolen tear over the woes of France, sung by Diane St. George, and felt a thrill of something very like jealousy as he watched her after the song, graciously receiving compliments from the most distinguished men in the room, and ignoring himself for the rest of the evening—or rather morning.

Even the company of his sister did not comfort him much, for Emilia avoided him a good deal, and was much taken up with the attentions of a number of young officers, so that Steinmark finally retired in something of a pet and went to bed to dream of Diane.

And dream about her he did, till, what with champagne and incipient love, it was half-past nine next day before he woke up, to hear the waiter pounding at the door.

"What's the matter, you French pig? What the deuce are you making all that disturbance for?" he shouted in his most ill-tempered tones.

"A letter for monsieur," was the reply; and Steinmark saw a white note shoved under the door, and heard the waiter go away.

Puzzled and astonished, he got out of bed to read it, and found:

"Monsieur le Comte de Steinmark:

"MONSIEUR—N'oubliez pas, je vous prie, la Salle d'Armes, a dix heures, car j'y serais. D." [Don't forget the Hall of Arms at ten, for I shall be there. D.]

He looked at the clock and began to dress himself with desperate speed, for he had forgotten all about his singular engagement to fence with the Countess of St. George that morning.

The tremor which he felt at his heart convinced him that he was in love. He remembered the same feeling in old times, when Stephanie had been particularly cruel, and it was with a mingled sense of joy and sadness that he realized that he was madly in love once more—in love with Diane St. George, who hated Prussia as badly as he did France—in love, with a hopeless, helpless love that could only end in misery for both of them, especially himself.

He felt ashamed to think that she had angered him so much the evening before that he had been led to boast before a lady of matters in which ladies usually took no interest, and had actually accepted a challenge to fence with Diane.

"I was a fool," he muttered, as he put on his best morning suit and made himself as handsome as possible. "I shall have to let her hit me three or four times to please her, and then she will probably laugh at me and think I am no fencer. And if I hit her and fence my best, I shall be thought a brute and a boor. It's all wrong anyway. I must apologize and decline to meet her."

He ran down-stairs, too much in a hurry for breakfast, his hand feverish and shaky from loss of sleep and champagne, and asked for the *Salle d'Armes*.

"Opposite the Kursaal, monsieur. It is kept by Grisier, and since Madame de St. George has resided here all the ladies go there in the morning to see her fence with the gentlemen. Some of the ladies are beginning to fence too," added the landlord rubbing his hands. "It has become quite the fashion, monsieur."

Steinmark hurried out of the Kursaal [state gambling house] and found, opposite to it, a pretty little building, inscribed: "Grisier, Salle d'Armes. L'Escrime et le Boxe a l'Anglais." [Fencing and boxing, English fashion.]

Groups of ladies and gentlemen were going up the steps and his heart began to palpitate with a new fear.

"All the world will see me, and it will be noised over Germany that I have fenced with a lady. What shall I do?"

He hesitated and was on the point of turning back, so great was his fear of the ridicule he anticipated, when a pony phaeton rattled up, driven by Stephanie von Werder, having his sister Emilia beside him.

And Stephanie's sharp eyes were on him before he could escape, and she pounced on him at once.

"Otto, Otto, cher Otto, come and take us in. Emilia is determined to see you fence, and all Baden is in waiting. Between us two a good many gentlemen here would like to see Diane's pride taken down, for she is so insufferably haughty that they are all afraid of her. What say you, Emilia? Do you like her?"

This while she was getting out, assisted by Otto, who had assigned himself to the inevitable, and while they were ascending the steps of the *Salle d'Armes* together.

Emilia seemed to be unusually quiet and thoughtful that morning, and it was in a low voice she answered:

"I hardly know. Madame is very beautiful; but too—too—"

"Too masculine, you mean? Yes, but that comes of her early life. It is hard to tell

whether she is more masculine than her brother Dion is effeminate. You will certainly fall in love with him when you see him, Emilia."

They were at the door of the hall up stairs, and chattering. Stephanie was jostled by a well-dressed crowd as she said this, so that she did not notice the sudden flaming up of a blush in Emilia's face, and Otto was so much occupied in controlling his own "stage fright"—for it was nothing less—that he never looked at his sister.

They found the sides of the hall packed with people, among whom at least two-thirds were ladies, and all were evidently of the first rank and fashion, for they stared at the new-comers with that peculiar stony glare that is rarely found outside of the aristocracy of Europe and the plutocracy of Republican New York.

As for Steinmark, his entrance was the signal for a low buzz, and the fans fluttered vigorously as the stalwart ex-cuirassier advanced and handed the ladies with him to their seats at one end of the hall, in the only vacant space left.

Then he looked uneasily round, for he had become self-conscious for the first time in his life since he had been a cadet, and found that every one was looking at him.

He turned red and fidgeted, for he had arrived at that pitch of nervousness when one beholds only a sea of faces and can distinguish none separately.

Then came toward him a thin, wiry-looking man in a white fencing jacket, smiling, bowing, rubbing his hands and saying:

"Monsieur le Comte de Steinmark, I believe. Madame la Comtesse awaits your coming. You are the second on the list to-day. The first is M. le Duc de Gerolstein. Will monsieur come to the gentlemen's dressing room, where I will provide the necessary costume?"

Devilshead got up and drew the fencing-master to one side. He was almost coaxing in his tone, and he condescended to speak French.

"See here, my dear Grisier, this will not do. I can't fence with a lady before all these people. I am too rough. I might hurt her. It is too ridiculous to think of. I'll try a bout with you, if you like, for fun; but I can't—you know—I—"

Grisier shrugged and smiled in his politest manner.

"With me, monsieur? Oh, no, that is impossible, you know. I am a professional, and never give assaults with amateurs. Do not fear for Madame la Comtesse. She will give you all the trouble you wish. Ah, here comes the duke. The fun will begin now."

A tall elegant young man in a very dandified fencing dress came in from the gentlemen's dressing-room, foil and mask in hand, smiling and bowing to the spectators; and at the same moment, from the opposite door, came Diane de St. George, in a suit of black velvet and crimson satin, slashed with gold, that made her more provokingly beautiful than ever, with short skirts, full gathered knee drawers, black stockings clocked with gold, velvet slippers and white gloves.

She too carried a foil with costly handle, and a mask that clasped on to a velvet cap that seemed to cover some sort of a helmet.

Steinmark looked at the brilliant Amazon, with her haughty defiant face, and felt that he could not safely decline a contest with her. She seemed, as Grisier said, abundantly able to take care of herself, and it was with a sigh that he said:

"Well, I suppose it must be so. But let me see this bout with the young man. Can he fence?"

"Eh, *mon Dieu*, Monsieur le Duc is one of my pupils," answered Grisier in a tone that denoted a complete settlement of the question to his own mind.

Steinmark fell back. He tried to catch Diane's eye to salute her, but the Amazon persisted in ignoring him, and it was with a dull uneasy gnawing at his heart that he planted himself in the door of the dressing-room to look on.

He saw both execute the graceful fencing salute, with its various fine attitudes, and could not avoid noticing that the countess was a perfectly finished mistress of her weapon, with a suppleness and force that exceeded that of any man he had ever seen with the foils.

When they finally put on their masks, stamped and began the assault, he found himself as silent and breathless as any one else in the room, watching.

The Duke of Gerolstein was evidently a first-class amateur from his attitude, but he was as evidently afraid of his antagonist, for it was with the utmost caution that he advanced within measure, and her slightest motion made him spring back.

Steinmark got so much interested that he found himself muttering:

"Don't be so timid. Lunge straight in *carte* with good opposition. She won't attack. She's waiting. Ha! By Jove! That's splendid! Disarmed!"

A round of applause burst from the spectators; the ladies being the most enthusiastic.

The duke had at last lunged, as Steinmark had wished, in *carte*, and the countess, with a sud-

den parry Devilshead had never seen in his life, sent his foil flying off to the left with a clash on the floor, at the feet of a row of spectators.

Without another word the big Prussian touched Grisier on the shoulder and beckoned him into the dressing-room.

Then he shut the door and said:

"All right. I'll fence. That's a neat trick, but she can't do it on my wrist. That duke of yours has no more strength than a cat."

Grisier shrugged his shoulders as he handed his guest a white jacket, fencing glove, foil and mask.

"I would advise monsieur not to be too confident," he said. "Madame disarmed me constantly for a week, before I learned that trick, and I have something of a wrist of my own too. That jacket fits well. Monsieur has a fine figure. Come, we are ready now."

CHAPTER IX.

A NEAT TRICK.

STEINMARK stalked out into the hall amid rounds of applause from the ladies, to whom his stalwart frame and stern handsome face had already made him a hero.

It seemed that during his absence the poor duke had received a most complete defeat, for the young man had taken off his mask and was looking very red and trying his best to be easy as he conversed with his beautiful conqueror, who on her part looked pleased and more polite than Steinmark had thought possible for her haughty face.

"It is nothing, monsieur," he heard her say. "You would not think of fencing an assault with Grisier, and I am practically a professional. No amateur can hit me. You will do better some day when you have learned how to hold a foil."

"How to—" stammered the poor duke, with excessive mortification. "Why, madame, I thought—"

"Of course you thought—they all think. Here is M. De Steinmark; he thinks too. Ah, good-day, count. Is your hand sure to-day?"

It was the first she had deigned to notice him, and there was a tone of mocking irony in the question that would have angered him at another time.

But Steinmark had heard the clash of steel, and it seemed to have driven every softer feeling and weakness out of his mind. He had forgotten Diane was a woman; he only saw in her a splendid fencer, worthy of his best skill, but whom he felt confident of beating.

"My hand is as usual, monsieur—madame, I mean," he answered with a frank cheery laugh. "I forget to-day in which capacity I am to address you, for which I ask pardon. May I ask you to excuse the posturing before the assault? It always looks to me ridiculous, and I am never in good humor till the blades cross in earnest."

Her eye flashed defiantly at him, and her lip curled with something of a sneer as she said indifferently: "As you please. I fence either style—even brigand if you choose it."

Steinmark laughed. He saw she was trying to frighten him and shake his nerve in advance; for "brigand fencing," is a sort of rough and tumble fight in which it is allowable to grasp the adversary with either hand, ending in a scuffle in which a woman would stand no chance against a strong man like himself.

"Oh no, madame, not brigand style, if you please. I am too little and weak to hope to beat you at that. Come, whenever you are ready." He noticed, as she stood opposite, that she was a tall woman, with a compact frame and hardly any of the swelling contour that marked—Madame von Werder for instance. She looked, indeed, more like a divinely handsome youth than a woman, as she stood there and quietly put on her mask, and it was with the fierce stamp and keen frowning look of an old fencer, that she threw herself on guard and said:

"Come, monsieur, I await you."

Steinmark drew himself up and made his sword whistle in the sharp down cut of the salute, which she instantly answered, springing back out of measure, and sarcastically observing:

"I thought there was to be none of the usual posturing before the assault, monsieur."

He smiled good-temperedly, for nothing irritated him when once he had a sword in his hand, and said as he crouched down into his most cautious attitude:

"Now we'll see what you are made of, my haughty lady."

There was something in the grim smile of Devilshead, the fierce glare of his gray eyes, albeit he was unconscious of his forbidding looks, that hushed even the countess, and the whole room became as still as death, as the foils grated against each other.

He had sunk to half his usual height, and was feeling, with a hard pressure of his powerful arm, for an opening, seeking to throw his antagonist's sword out of line, and stealthily slipping forward inch by inch.

Then, just as he had reached the point when he was about to dart in a thrust by main force like a thunderbolt, the countess, whose eyes had never left his sword arm, suddenly shifted her blade up near his point, forced it back by the

increased leverage, and sprung actively back out of peril.

There was a buzz in the hall. "He has made her give ground. He is the best yet."

The countess heard the buzz, and the set, watchful look on her face changed to an angry flush as she set her white teeth.

"Come," she said, "I know that style too. That is Italian. Now"

As she spoke she set her left hand to her belt, placed the foil on her right knee, pointing to the ground, leaning forward in an attitude of apparent innocence, and observed:

"There! Now, monsieur, advance if you think best."

She was well out of measure, but the bait was too tempting to be resisted. Steinmark advanced; made a straight fierce lunge in *carte*; and the next moment, to his intense mortification and utter amazement, found his sword whipped out of his hand by a parry so quick he could not tell how it was made; his wrist twisted back with a pain as if a knife were at the joint; and there he was, all extended; his empty hand in the air; while a scream in his rear showed him that his foil had been flung among the spectators—a distance of at least thirty feet.

And as if to complete his mortification the lady sprung up to her full height, and said, loud enough to be heard all over the hall by the smiling assembly:

"My dear Monsieur Steinmark, I am so sorry I hurt your wrist. Believe me, you should take a few lessons from Grisier. You held a foil like a club."

"But Steinmark was not the man to let a single disarm put him out of spirits forever. He was keenly mortified, it is true; but he knew that he had been disarmed by a cunning trick of some sort, and he was determined to find out what it was.

He rose up, saluted politely; took the foil which Grisier, grinning, brought to him, and then came on guard as if nothing had happened after a furtive rub at the powerful wrist of which he had boasted to the master.

Steinmark had settled down to his best now, and when the countess came down to the careless looking "Spanish guard" which she had used before, he imitated her example. He thought he had divined the secret of her success.

She laughed slightly as she saw him assume the attitude.

"Aha! It is for me then to attack," she cried. "Take care of your third button, monsieur. Now!"

Like a flash she lunged half-way so lightly that he missed his parry and was compelled to spring back to avoid a second full thrust, that nearly touched the very button she mentioned.

But this was what he was used to, and back he came in the swift rally, darting in a third thrust that made her draw back in turn, but so quickly did she put in a fourth and then a fifth that he came a little too late in his parry every time, and at last felt the sharp prod of the foil on the place she had indicated, when she leaped back, pointed her foil at him and called out:

"A hit, a hit. Own it!"

He drew up, saluted and said:

"It is a hit, madame. You fence better than I with the small-sword. I own myself vanquished."

He had only needed the second bout to convince him of this. A trick he might learn, but the combination of quickness, subtlety, coolness and judgment, that the Amazon had showed in that short rally, was something that could not be attained without constant practice.

And Steinmark was no fool to make himself a laughing-stock to the fashionables of Baden. He had put this phenomenal fencer—by her own showing trained from a child by the most celebrated master of Europe—to her trumps to beat him, and he was satisfied, for he had never prided himself much on his school fencing.

She noticed his limitation of her mastery, and asked:

"Shall we try brigand style now, or would you prefer saber, rapier, or dagger? I use all."

He bowed low.

"Not brigand, if you please. It is too rough for a lady. Saber, if you are not satisfied with one victory. I warn you I always cut hard when I use the saber."

"It is indifferent," she answered. "I have on armor now, under my dress. Grisier will provide you."

"It is unnecessary, except a heavier mask," observed Steinmark, quietly. "I hardly think you will hurt me much with the edge, whatever your skill with the point."

"I insist on your putting on a cuirass and gauntlets," she said, in a peremptory tone. "I never fence otherwise in sport."

"Very well, madame, I obey."

And Steinmark was soon clad in a cuirass and big steel gauntlets that gave him a medieval look, while the countess merely assumed a pair of gold-worked steel gloves and a heavier mask to her helmet.

Then both took basket-hilted blunt swords, in shape exactly like the schlager familiar to students, and advanced to the assault.

But here again Steinmark was puzzled at the start. He had always been used to cross the swords and stand up to a chalk line.

In fact, in student duels, the man who gives back a step from the chalk line after being put there by the seconds is accounted a coward.

But the countess had no sooner crossed swords than she leaped back as she had done in fencing, and took the same puzzling attitude, waiting with her sword resting on her knee.

And Steinmark was used to feeling his opponent's blade at all times. He felt lost as soon as he quitted it, except for a blow.

Therefore the attitude of the countess puzzled him, and moreover he felt afraid to hurt her, she looked so slender and delicate.

While he stood hesitating, she sprang at him, threatening him with wide motions of the sword, and with the instinct of the old swordsman he cut at her head with a time slash, "to keep her in order" as he muttered.

But to his surprise, all her apparently wide feints did not prevent her from parrying in time; and what was more, he received a slash over the arm almost at the same instant, while Diane said in a scolding tone, as if addressing a pupil:

"Hold your hand up. Don't you know any better than to make a false cut?"

She had struck him—him, Devilshead, who thought he could beat the world at broadsword fighting!

He was nettled now, and in his pique forgot entirely that it was a woman with whom he was in playful contest.

He rushed in as he was wont in schlager duels, and plied the countess with blow on blow, driving her back over and round the room, but never, somehow, getting in a good blow at the head, while he felt every now and then a slash on the arm, or cuirass, or thigh, that showed him where he would have been in a duel *a l'outrance*, with sharp weapons, even with this woman.

Then at last he had got her so close to the spectators she could evade him no more, and here he beat down her guard and got in one solid blow on her helmet which rung again, and under which she faltered and sunk down; for in his excitement he had smitten with the full force of his powerful arm.

It was not till she fell and a general buzz of commiseration went up from the spectators, that he began to realize what he had done, and then a crowd of people had gathered round and were lifting up the countess, whose mask was removed and showed her very pale, with a little streak of blood running down from under her hair.

Then Steinmark threw away his sword, dashed off his helmet, and cried out as he fell at her feet:

"My God! I forgot it was a girl. I have hurt her."

CHAPTER X.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

EMILIA VON STEINMARK had been looking on at the fencing with a fixed, absorbed attention that let nothing escape her.

She had never seen such a thing before and there was something morbid in the interest awakened by the mimic combat, so fiercely was it conducted.

She had laughed and clapped her hands as vigorously as any at the amusing discomfiture of the handsome Duke of Gerolstein, and had felt a strange mixture of fun and chagrin at the trick by which her brother had been disarmed of his foil.

But when the saber contest began, in common with the rest, she had held her breath in excitement, for she saw Otto was angry and had forgotten that his opponent was, after all, a woman.

And when she finally saw the countess cut down by main force she uttered an involuntary shriek of alarm, and ran to lift her, crying out indignantly:

"Shame, shame, Otto! You are a brute! You've killed her!"

And indeed it seemed as if the fair fencer were hurt, for it was some moments before she could speak, and then it was only to gasp:

"You struck—false—I could have—killed you—ten times—over."

Otto was kneeling at her feet with his head bowed down in sore humiliation, and he made no answer.

He did not even look up, and the countess, after a few minutes, was able to stand up and looked down at him a little more kindly.

"You are a rough opponent in a rally," she said with a faint smile, and "I think we will call it quits to-day. We will try it again tomorrow if you like, for in truth you have given me a headache."

He shook his head and looked up, his eyes full of tears.

"I will never cross swords with you again," he said. "I might have killed you, madame."

"It would have been one French woman the less," she observed with a touch of her old sarcasm. "You would not have minded that."

"How can you speak thus?" he pleaded in a low voice. "Do you think I war on women or crow over a fallen foe, Diane?"

People began to draw away from them both now, and to shrug and whisper smilingly to each other, for scandal was a necessity at Baden. He rose up and half led, half carried his beautiful antagonist to the door of the ladies' dressing-room, where he left her with Emilia, and then stalked solemnly away to the other side with a face so long and sorrowful that the ladies nudged each other and said:

"It's an affair of the heart after the affair of the head. There will be an alliance between France and Prussia yet, mark my words."

And that afternoon it was all over the Kur-saal and the drive and the long promenade under the lime trees, that the Countess of St. George and Count Steinmark had fallen in love over a fencing bout, that he had broken her head and she had stolen his heart, and how it would be an excellent thing for both parties, and so on.

But as for Steinmark, he went to Madame von Werder's as soon as it was early enough to call, and he bored and piqued that plump and coquettish lady to the verge of telling him to go away.

For he talked of nothing but Diane De St. George, and what a brute he was, and how lovely she was, and how he blamed himself for his brutality; and he went to raving about her eyes and her hair and her teeth, till Stephanie finally cried out in a pet:

"It is evident, Otto, that the new love has quite made you forget you are talking to a woman you once vowed you loved to distraction. But it's the same with all you men. A new face makes you wild."

Otto colored up furiously.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but you are married, you know, and I thought you liked me enough to be my friend, Stephanie. I am sorry I offended you."

She began to laugh affectedly.

"You silly Otto, I am not offended, but you know a woman does not like to hear another woman cried up as the only beauty in the world. It's not polite to the sex, Otto."

"Oh, I never meant to say you were not handsome," blundered he; "but then she's so slender and full of grace in every movement."

Stephanie burst out laughing.

"And I am fat—alas! Otto, it is too true. But here comes Emilia. Spend your raptures on her. She has come from your slender graceful countess—whose head you cut open," she added, with considerable malice as she left the room much to the confusion of Steinmark, who flew to his sister and anxiously asked:

"Oh, Emilia, is she better? I shall never forgive myself if I have hurt her permanently. Tell me quickly for the love of Heaven."

Emilia looked pale and her eyes were red, as if she had been crying.

"She is better, Otto," she said, quietly. "It was only a little cut, where the iron of the helmet was forced down through the padding, the doctor says. But the shock of the blow gave her a bad headache at first."

"And tell me, does she—does she—hate me very much?" asked Otto, his generally grim mouth quivering with anxiety. "Will she not forgive me that unlucky blow?"

"In truth, Otto, I cannot say. I half think she likes you better for it. She has been used to despise men so much, superior as she is to most of them in their very points of skill in arms, that it is a new sensation to her to be beaten."

"But I did not beat her," urged Steinmark, ingenuously. "In fact she cut me again and again, only you in the seats did not see it in the confusion of the rally. Had it been a duel—"

He stopped suddenly and groaned.

"A duel with her! Oh what a fool I am to think of fighting with a woman in real earnest."

Then he looked up, as timidly as if he had been a child afraid of reproof, and whispered:

"What did she say, Emilia?"

Emilia had sat down on a sofa, and her brother knelt by her, while she smoothed down his fair curls.

"At first she said little; for her head ached a good deal—how cruel you can be, Otto! and then she lay thinking a while, as I was bathing her forehead, and at last said to me, all of a sudden: 'Mademoiselle von Steinmark, I wish I were a man. I would like to be just such a man as your brother.' I was a little surprised, and said: 'I thought you would never forgive him that blow, madame.' But she only smiled, and answered: 'Ah! how noble he looked! I could fancy he must be grand in a charge.' And after that she fell asleep and I left her, for she will be better when she wakes."

Otto ruminated a moment, and then suddenly asked:

"Did you see her brother, the count?"

Emilia had schooled herself for the question; but she colored slightly as she answered:

"No; he is away from home."

"Why, Stephanie said he was here, and that he was so like her one would know them for twins."

"I did not see him," said Emilia, coldly.

"The servants said he was away at Heidelberg."

Steinmark started and rose to his feet, muttering:

"At Heidelberg! And I not there!"

He paced up and down the room as if much perturbed in mind, and at last stopped before Emilia.

"Little sister, can I trust you with a secret that concerns my honor?"

She looked up at him in a vague, frightened way, and stammered:

"Your honor, Otto? What has he to do with your honor—or mine?" she added, under her breath.

He did not seem to notice her disturbance of mind, but went on:

"Will you promise to keep my secret in your own breast, sacredly?"

"I will tell no one," she answered, her simple word being law to him.

"Listen, Emilia. This man, this Count of St. George, is a murderer, a swordsman who spares no life, and who has justly earned the title of the Demon Duelist. He has killed man after man of our corps, and all the students of Heidelberg have sworn an oath to take his life. If I meet him, I am bound to challenge him; and he or I must die, and after us every member of the student corps. And yet—unhappy that I am—I love this man's sister. Deeply dyed in crime as he is, I feel to-night that I would rather fall by his hand than take his life. Yet, *we must meet*. I cannot break my oath and forfeit my honor. What shall I do, Emilia? Must I kill him and lose her at a blow, or must I lose life and her at once?"

Emilia sat looking sadly at the ground while he spoke, and the tears were rolling down her cheeks as she said, in a low voice:

"Alas, my brother!"

He thought she was only pitying his sorrows, but presently she said in a sort of stifled voice:

"Otto, I too have a secret."

He started back, frowning, and his voice had a menacing accent as he said:

"I thought you had not seen him."

She looked up boldly.

"Do you think Emilia von Steinmark would tell a falsehood?"

He bowed, and his face cleared.

"My sister, I ask pardon. Go on. I will keep your secret on my honor as a gentleman."

She was silent for a little, tracing a pattern of the carpet with her slipper, but at last said with an effort:

"The count is not here, and I do not know that I have seen him, but I fear that I have. Do you remember the forest of Darmstadt, where you met me and asked if the robbers had stopped me? I evaded you and did all but tell a direct lie. In fact I was stopped by the ruffian they call Schinderhannes, who was about to insult your sister when I was saved by the arrival of a gentleman who made the men give up all their plunder to me at once."

Steinmark's nostrils had dilated during her little story like those of a wild beast, and he asked hoarsely:

"Did Schinderhannes or his men touch you or speak amiss?"

"No. The ruffian asked politely enough for a kiss, but that was all."

"All!" growled the Prussian like a savage wild boar. "*All! Gott in Himmel*, I will flay him alive!"

"Do as you like about that," she said indifferently. "He is a common ruffian. But the other must have been a sort of chief among them, for they obeyed him without so much as one murmur, and he escorted me to my carriage as if he had been a prince."

"And who was this man, think you?" asked Steinmark.

Emilia hesitated.

"I think he was Diane's brother," she said simply.

"Why?"

Steinmark was nearly as pale as his sister now.

"Because he was her very image, in face, voice, everything but dress," she made answer in low tones. "Dion and Diane must be twins."

"They are," he said quietly. "He must have taken the name of St. George after the true St. George's death. Listen."

He gave her a rapid sketch of what he had gathered from Stephanie and Diane on the previous night and concluded:

"The general count must have died in some very cruel manner, which has greatly exasperated both brother and sister; and I fancy they are monomaniacs on the subject of vengeance. But is that all you have to say, Emilia?"

She blushed painfully now, and it was in a very low tone she said:

"No, my brother, not all. You—you are not alone in your sorrow."

Steinmark looked at her in a mournful manner, not devoid of pride. Then he came over to her and laid his hand softly on her head.

"Sister, I forgive you freely," he said in a low stifled voice. "If I in my strength could not resist this love, how could a child like you?"

And you love him? He must be a man for women to worship, if he be like her."

"It is strange," answered Emilia musingly, "that I do not like her at all, Otto. I cannot. She is too like him and looks so masculine."

"Masculine?" he echoed angrily. "She is the most beautiful woman I ever saw when she is in a passion. Worth a million plump wax dolls like Stephanie. I fancy though, he must be rather effeminate in his looks, from all I hear."

"Effeminate!" she retorted with heat. "He is the most gloriously handsome man I ever saw—a perfect demigod. These milk and water blue-eyed students look like babies beside him. And he is so noble and generous. I called him Karl von Moor, for he is the very image of Schiller's hero in the Robbers."

Steinmark patted her sunny head in a kind, brotherly way.

"We'll not quarrel, Emilia. *Ach Gott*, my dear, we have sorrow enough before us. You love him, and he is a murderer and a robber, as we both know; and I love his sister, knowing that I have sworn to kill the brother or lose my own life. The League can never be broken. He must die and I must die, and you two women, alas! must bear all the sorrow. Blood for us, tears for you. Ah, my sister, it is a hard fate. Would I had never seen her or you him."

Emilia hesitated a little, weeping in silence, and at last burst out with a sob:

"Oh, I cannot, I cannot! Why, Otto, I would faint for joy to see him again! Ah, Otto, kill me before I prove a disgrace to Steinmark."

"That you will never be," he replied gravely. "It is I, with my wild life, my wasted money, my duels, my carousals, who have been the only disgrace. And all for a fat little fool I had not seen for eight years. I thought her an angel and I come back to find her—bah! what a fool I was! But I will do so no more. Diane is a woman worthy of any man's love, and please heaven—"

He stopped as if ashamed. The words seemed to stick in his throat.

Emilia shook her head sadly.

"I see no way but one to peace, Otto," she murmured softly; "and that is one you and he will never take."

"What road is that?" asked Otto.

"The way of forgiveness," she said in a steadier voice. "The wars are over, and it is time for hate to give place to love."

Even as she spoke the servant brought a letter to Otto which he opened. It ran thus:

"The Demon Duelist has killed Von Bredow. Come quickly. BERGER."

CHAPTER XI.

STEINMARK'S STRATEGY.

It was late next day when four smoking post-horses drew up in Heidelberg at the door of Moritz Berger, chief of the Red Cap Corps, and Steinmark got out, looking pale and grim, to be greeted by his comrade.

They went up stairs to the dingy lodgings of the student—for Berger was a poor man—and Steinmark threw himself into a chair, and asked:

"How did it happen?"

Berger answered as if he understood him at once.

"He came here the very evening you left town and sauntered into the Rathskeller as if he feared nothing. There were a number of strangers there among the townspeople, and we found afterward they were in league with him."

"How do you know it?"

"Because they helped him—but you shall hear all. Bredow was sitting at one of the tables, and raving about the beautiful lady he met in the forest, when St. George came in and advanced in his usual style to the table he claims as his own. No one was there, and he called for a bottle of wine. Then he looked round with that devilish air of malignity he can assume so well, and called out. 'A health to you German cowards of all colors!' Of course every man was on his feet in a moment, and the glasses were just beginning to fly, when, to our amazement, the townfolks rushed to his help, and the fight became so hot that we were driven into the street. More than half our men were away at their rooms, you know. But they rallied at sound of the riot and came running up to join us, just as the Burgomaster and gendarmes ran in too with their carbines. Then the battle stopped."

"But Bredow; how came he in the trouble, Berger?"

"He was not. For some reason he kept out of it, and the men taunted him with being a coward."

"No, no, Berger. He was no coward," observed Steinmark gravely. "They made a mistake there."

"So it turned out; for it was Bredow who challenged the count, as soon as quiet was restored, chose pistols for weapons, and was killed yesterday morning by St. George."

Steinmark looked curiously at the other and asked:

"Are you sure? Pistols? Did he hit St. George?"

"He did not try to. He fired in the air."

"In the air? Then he must have courted death. Did St. George fight him willingly?"

"No, to do him justice, he tried to decline the contest on the ground that he had never quarreled with Austrians. Bredow was an Austrian, you know. But the poor fellow insisted, and the count shot him through the breast. It was thought at first that he might recover, and St. George expressed his sorrow to him as he lay, but I heard Bredow say to him: 'It is no use, count. Better to die with honor than live to meet dishonor! And die he did in two hours after.'"

"And St. George, where is he?"

"Disappeared to the forest, and Schinderhannes is out again. The carriage of Count Spickeler was robbed to-day, and the Count was whipped on the high road and sent into town with hardly clothes for decency."

Steinmark frowned thoughtfully.

"Spickeler—another Prussian. This St. George means war!"

"War! I should say so. What are we to do, Otto? The men are frightened."

"Frightened? Ah, yes. Let me see. It is now five o'clock, and the sun sets at eight. Send out the word. I am going through the forest to-night."

"With the League?"

"No; alone."

"How alone? on foot?"

"No, in a carriage. I want to be stopped. If I can find volunteers, so much the better."

Berger's eyes flashed joyfully.

"I see; a trap."

"Perhaps. It may end in our being caught ourselves though."

"No matter. It is better than this letting ourselves be killed like so many sheep, one after the other."

"Very well. Send the word for the League to seek the forest, one by one, by the back road, through the Court of Death after sunset."

Berger started and turned pale.

"Impossible. You could not get them to go that way now, after dark. They say it is haunted, and God knows it has reason to be."

Steinmark shrugged his shoulders in an impatient way.

"And they expect to run down this man, who fears neither God nor ghost. I tell you it must be done. It is our only way to leave town without exciting suspicion. The people of the town are in league with the robbers and inform them of all our plans."

But Berger shook his head.

"I know our men, Otto. They do not lack courage, but they all believe in the Wild Huntsman and vampires. If some one would lead them, it might be done."

"Very well. Lead them."

The student turned red and pale and at last said:

"Frankly, I dare not. I know I am a fool; but custom and nature are too strong for my sense. I would go in the carriage cheerfully if I knew it were certain death; but face the shadows of that dismal court after dark—no, I should only break down, and disgrace the League."

Steinmark ground his teeth in a way that denoted his anger.

"I wish I could cut myself in two," he growled at last. "It needs a cool head at both ends of the line, and I can hardly trust any one. Will you go in the carriage?"

"Certainly."

Berger was still pale as he spoke, but his tone was firm.

"Very good. I warn you, however, that you will be killed."

"I am ready to die," was the simple reply of the student.

"Of course; but that is not the point. You must make account of at least ten of these scoundrels before you are killed."

"Alone?"

"No. You can take eight men."

"How?"

"Simple enough. Four inside; two on the box, and two on the horses as postillions. I would say two more behind, if I thought you could get that number of good shots."

"I can. The Schutzen Corps can give us twenty."

"Target-shooters—yes—but your targets will shoot back."

"Never mind. I will have men who served at Bantzen and Paris."

"Well, we shall see. Remember, yours will be the post of danger."

"I am ready for it."

"My foes will only be ghosts, and they don't shoot. I will lead the men by the back road."

Berger looked immensely relieved.

"Pardon me, Steinmark. Don't think I am a fool and a coward both—"

"I have said you will have the post of danger," returned Otto, dryly.

"Be it so. Now tell me what I am to do, and what you will do to help me in need."

"Simple enough. You will go out, and tell people you are going to Darmstadt on a bet

to-night. You will warn your men quietly, and start at dark. You will take the regular postillions and only one friend with you as you start, and hide your arms in the carriage. The other men will go out of town separately, and meet you at the place where the Mosbach road comes in. They will have their arms and stop you as if they were robbers."

"I see the plan. Go on."

"They will gag the postillions, tie them to trees, and then you will all go on."

"Very good. Shall we trot?"

"No. Walk the horses to give us all the time we need. Keep a sharp look-out, and if you hear any noise get out and take to the trees."

"Is that all?"

"That is enough. I will see to the rest. You will probably have to fight for about ten minutes before we can get up to take the robbers in the rear. Do you comprehend?"

"I do."

"And if some of you get killed, you may make up your minds you will be avenged. Now go and send out the word that the corps will have a shooting-match in the ruins of the castle, and let them know I will be there."

Berger rose up and saluted the chief of the League with military precision.

"I go, commandant," he said, and he was as good as his word.

As for Steinmark, he went to the rooms of his friend Von Retz, and ate supper, after which he smoked a pipe ostentatiously at the window, with his slippered feet on the sill, to let the townsfolk know where he was, keeping a vigilant watch on the passers-by.

He noticed many bearded faces in the streets, and could catch the sound of French conversation as he listened, and muttered to himself:

"I thought as much. The French poison works still. Half these men hate a fellow German worse than their hereditary enemies."

He noticed also the students in little groups, most of them wearing cloaks, going toward the ruins, and knew that they were obeying his summons. A few carried rifles openly, as if they were going to a match on the shooting ground.

As the sun set and twilight grew deeper, he saw Berger's carriage drive slowly by toward the forest; while groups of the bearded men seemed to observe it with attention.

"Stare away, gentlemen," he said, to himself. "You'll be more surprised to-morrow, I think."

As it grew dark he shut the window, hastily assumed his boots, armed himself to the teeth, threw a large cloak over all, and sallied out by the back way to the ruins, which he gained in the last glimmer of the fading twilight.

He passed on toward the dismal Court of Death, and had reached the middle of the ruins, when a figure rose up in the starlight, a rifle-lock clicked, and a voice said cautiously:

"Stand for Steinmark!"

"Steinmark advances for St. George," he replied, in the same tone.

The student threw his rifle over his arm, and exclaimed, with a sigh of relief:

"It is you, commandant. The men are getting very nervous, and talk of going back. They swear they hear groans in the Death Court."

"So much the better," was the frigid reply.

"Some one is alive there. Let us advance. Dead men do not groan, and they shoot no bullets."

His voice was low but composed, and almost instantly a dense crowd of figures rose up from among the ruins, where they had huddled together like sheep, in the common instinct of superstitious nervousness.

And yet they were all brave men; only they had vivid German imaginations, fed from childhood on legends and tales of marvel, and now excited to the utmost by the darkness and the perilous errand on which they had come.

Steinmark raised his hand as a signal for silence, though not a soul spoke, and addressed them:

"Brothers of the League of Steel, I have brought you to this place to renew our oath, here, where the bodies of St. George's victims lie, and where their spirits cry in vain for vengeance. You fear groans in the Death Court. If those spirits groan, it is for very shame that their living comrades are afraid to pass by them on the road to avenge them. You remember Bredow, the last of them. A kinder soul never breathed. It is he who calls on you to avenge him. Listen. This St. George has a sister, and Bredow loved her. He threw away his life at the feet of her brother, because he could not kill the kinsman of the woman he loved. Did the Demon Duelist spare him for that? No. He spares none. 'Let us not spare him.' I will lead you. Who dare flinch from the road?"

As he spoke he advanced toward the Court of Death, and there was an universal murmur among the lately demoralized students:

"Forward! The spirits are those of our comrades. They will not hurt us. Forward for vengeance!"

And they advanced in silence toward the Court of Death.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST OF THE OLD GUARD.

OUT in the dense pine forest, down in a dell where the sunshine never penetrated, where an open space obtained for lack of light to feed vegetation, a group of ragged men sat round a fire and smoked their pipes, that very night.

All round them rose shelves of rock, overhanging the edges of the dell and worn away into shallow caves in several spots, while heaps of straw and fir branches showed that they were used as sleeping places.

All the men sitting round the fire were bearded and shaggy in their looks, dirty and unkempt, with a nondescript costume made of scraps from various garments.

Yet one thing was noticeable about the rags, all seemed to be remnants of some sort of uniform, and brass buttons were common. And if one could look closer he would notice that all the buttons bore a coronet on an eagle, with the letter "N" stamped over it.

Most of the men also wore some sort of a military cap, and two or three had bear-skin shakos with a gilt plate in front, bearing the late imperial arms of France.

Moreover, when they spoke, which was seldom and sullenly, most of them did so in French.

And all had weapons of some sort—firearms—with clean barrels.

The burly form of Schinderhannes with his huge red beard was an exception to the general rule. That interesting thief was an unmitigated ruffian without a touch of military pride in his slouchy dress, and his carbine and pistols were very dirty.

"How much longer, I wonder, is this sort of thing to last?" growled one of the men in the shakos. "Little did I think when *He* gave me this cross that the day would come when Pierre Bigot would be a common footpad. And the Old Guard has come to this at last!"

He was a grizzled man with a great red scar down one cheek that looked as if made by a sabre cut, and he hung his head in shame as he looked down at the faded ribbon and cross of the Legion of Honor that hung at his breast.

But Schinderhannes laughed.

"What more would you have?" he cried. "We have plenty to eat and drink: the weather is warm and we are making war on the accursed Prussians after our own fashion all the time. You old soldiers think there's no war without flags and music. Bah! I have made war thus all my life."

"And is this what you call war?" asked a younger man close by, with the ragged remnants of a hussar jacket hanging round him. "Robbing a coach where no one dares fight, and frightening women like the lady you insulted yesterday? My faith, I would rather a whole Prussian regiment came to rout us out, so we could die as we used to die, like soldiers."

"You're too squeamish, Lasalle: you'll get over it after awhile."

"After awhile," grumbled Bigot; "we shall be hung and serve us all right. I wish I could get out of this and back to Winieureux. I'd go to making shoes and let the 'balance of Europe' go to the devil. The Emperor is boxed up and the English have the key. They won't let him out like the others did from Elba. We are fools to stay here with you."

"Very well, gentlemen," returned the brigand coolly. "I have taken care of myself before without you, and I can do it again. But what say you to your oath to the count?"

"We were fools to make it and greater fools to keep it," retorted the ex-hussar gloomily. "I wish he were here now to tell him so."

"Don't be uneasy: he promised to come, and the general count never breaks his word," said Schinderhannes coolly. "If I mistake not, I hear his horse's feet now."

In fact, at that moment, the tramp of a horse among the dry sticks was plainly audible; and soon after the Count of St. George rode into the dell, followed by two gentlemen who had always acted as his seconds in his duels, and all three dismounted.

The military education and habits of the men round the fire was shown in nothing more strongly than that they all rose as he came in, and stood silently saluting till he had got off his horse.

Then he faced them, returned the salute, and said, with a slight sigh:

"Well, comrades, we are all here still."

There was a gloomy tone in his voice which harmonized with the dark surroundings.

The men were silent as he went to the fire, and looked hesitatingly at one another with many nods and winks, nudging each other.

At last Pierre Bigot, the oldest man, cleared his throat and said with a stiff salute:

"Hem! my general—excuse—but the fact is—may I be permitted speak on behalf of the rest?"

St. George wheeled around. One might see that his face was marble pale, and there was a certain softness in his dark eyes that had never been seen there by a German.

"Speak, comrade," he said, gently. "I will listen. I know what you are about to say, and it is just. You are tired of this ruthless war-

fare, and long to see your family at home. Is it not so, Corporal Bigot?"

The veteran saluted again and his voice was husky as he replied:

"General, I have not seen my little Annette since—since we went to Moscow. She was twelve then and now—don't be offended, general. I know how you have done all man could for the Emperor; but after all, what use is it? Fate is against us. We are only fifty, we of the Old Guard; and all Europe is against us. *He* has surrendered. Why should we struggle uselessly?"

St. George had listened to the old soldier with a countenance whose still pallor was the only token of the passions raging in his breast. Otherwise it was expressionless.

When Bigot had finished he asked:

"Is there any thing more, corporal?"

"No, my general, except that *we will never forsake you till you give your consent.*"

St. George turned away his head and held out his hand to the old corporal, who knelt down and kissed it as if it had been that of a king.

For a moment there was a deep silence, only broken by a sort of half-sob, half-gulp, of poor Bigot, who murmured:

"Don't be angry, general. We love the Emperor and you—but—"

St. George withdrew his hand softly and stroked the old soldier's cheek caressingly, as he said, in a broken voice:

"You are right, comrade—in a little while—your general—will speak."

The grim, bearded veterans of half a hundred battle-fields, ragged remnant of the once proud Old Guard, had taken off their hats, and were all standing looking on, with the tears running down their weather-beaten faces, as they watched the scene.

There was something intensely pathetic to one who remembered what they *had* been one short year before, to see them *now*.

At last St. George threw back his long hair with a toss, as if he were throwing off some weight, and spoke out clearly:

"The comrades will fall in."

As if by magic every man in the dell took his place in rank with the stiff precision of an automaton, and Bigot commanded:

"Eyes right! Steady! Front!"

Only Schinderhannes, slouching and indifferent, remained seated by the fire, and no one seemed to notice him.

Then St. George advanced before the fire and looked at the steadfast line. Ragged and dirty as they were, every musket was held in rigid uniformity, and the faces looked as if they had been cast in bronze.

He turned to his friends.

"Colonel Louvet, Major De Lisle, will you consent to what I am about to say to our comrades?"

Both gentlemen bowed silently.

"Comrades of the Old Guard," continued St. George, solemnly, "the time has come for us to part forever. I have seen it coming; dreaded it, but could not avert it. You know how we few, in one corner of Europe, clustered together and refused to submit when France had cravenly crouched to the miserable Bourbons. You know how my more than brother, my benefactor, whose name I bear, was murdered in cold blood, while a prisoner, by the accursed Prussians we drove howling from Berlin to the Baltic. When I saw his dead body riddled with bullets, I swore never to forgive the Prussians, and I never have. I have dearly avenged my widowed sister's loss and my own. But I have no right to make you suffer for my private quarrels. I began them alone, I will finish alone. Comrades, brothers of the Grand Army of France, my children, I release you from your promise. You are no longer soldiers. Go in peace, and may good fortune guard you home. The treasury is in the cavern yonder. Divide it honorably. We officers ask no share. Farewell."

His voice displayed more and more emotion as he went on; and as he said the last farewell he broke down and hid his face, while the soldiers sobbed aloud, dropped their muskets and crowded round him, kneeling, kissing his hands and clothes. Even his two fellow-officers were unable to restrain their tears.

"Oh, general," sobbed the ex-hussar; "to think it is all over at last, and that you were made a general too late to hold a command!"

St. George smiled sadly.

"Nay, comrade, I am prouder of this command than if I had a full division of troops under Louis the Imbecile. My men followed the first soldier of Europe, and I am the only living general of division decorated by Napoleon on the morning of Waterloo."

"Ah! that accursed traitor Grouchy!" groaned Bigot bitterly. "Had he only done his duty we might have beaten them after all. Had you only been in his place, general!"

It was characteristic of human nature that these men, who had been anxious to return to peaceful pursuits while they felt themselves bound in honor to live a life of hardship, seemed, now that they were free, to regret that they could not continue their old trade.

St. George smiled more cheerfully.

"Grouchy was only a part of fate," he said, "and it was to be. The map of Europe is fixed for half a century, my comrades, and we cannot change it. Bring out the treasure."

Several men ran to one of the hollows in the rocks at the side of the dell, and brought out quite a respectable heap of gold and silver pieces, which they piled in silence before St. George.

"Take what you please, general," said Bigot, bluntly. "The comrades all know that your head has planned the campaign, and that we have earned, in three months, ten years' pay in the Old Guard. Take it."

"Not a penny," he answered, firmly. "Yours was the peril, mine the profit. We three are officers, and we have saved our fortunes in France. You are poor men, and this is but a sorry reward for a man like you, Bigot, who took a Mameluke Bey prisoner at the Pyramids. Come, let each take a double handful to save time, and we will count what is left."

There was no more hesitation now, and the men were filling their pockets with the money, when Schinderhannes grumbled:

"And what's left for me, general?"

"What you hid in the hollow tree by the Chapel Spring," answered St. George, sternly. "Did you think you could deceive me? You are a robber by trade, who has served as a guide in a country we none of us knew, but you are not of us. Do you grumble, pig of an Alsatian? How know I you may not betray us yet? It may be best to kill you ere we leave this place, or you may inform the police."

Schinderhannes turned deadly pale and trembled as he looked round him.

"Indeed, general, I would not dream of such a thing," he stammered. "My own men are doing duty now—"

Bang! Bang!

Two shots were heard close by.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAST BATTLE.

In an instant every ex-soldier had snatched up his piece and run to fall into line, with the habits of ancient discipline.

There was no longer any question of leaving the service or keeping oaths: they simply fell in and looked to St. George for orders; and he on his part leaped to his horse with the other ex-officers, and rode to the entrance of the dell, saying instinctively:

"Forward and deploy on the old line. It is only the pickets."

The men swung into a little column, three abreast, and trotted into the woods after him, leaving the fire-lit dell and ensconcing themselves behind a low wall of rough stone that was built as a fortification close by, facing the way of Heidelberg.

After those two shots, however, nothing more was heard for some minutes, and St. George at last said in a low voice:

"Stay here, while I go forward to find what's the matter. Who is out?"

"Two of the 'ragamuffins,' general," responded Bigot, in a whisper. "There are six, besides Schinderhannes, and four are watching the road for carriages. Those shots came from the men on the back path!"

"The back path!"

The commander's tone was that of some anxiety, and he asked presently:

"Where is Schinderhannes?"

"*Bang!*" came as if for an answer.

This time they saw a flash in their front, far off in the dark woods, and heard the crackle and snap of dry sticks as the bullet cut its way through the branches over head and to the left.

"By Jove!" observed Colonel Louvet, with a little start. "That was not *our* picket. It came from the *enemy*."

They used their old campaign talk, as if they were still in actual warfare.

St. George made a motion with his hand for silence, and all listened intently.

Presently they could hear the low, distant trample of many feet on the dead pine needles, muffled by the soft carpet, except when some one trod on a dry stick.

A moment later there was a hurried step, and a man came running in, breathless, to the breastwork, as if he knew where he was going.

It was one of the "ragamuffins," as Bigot called them, one of the old professional robbers of Schinderhannes, whom the soldiers had unwillingly joined for mutual aid and assistance.

He did not express surprise at finding them inside, but gasped:

"They're coming—too many for us—I don't know why we—didn't get news."

"How many are there?" asked St. George, in a low tone.

"Too many for us. All the students," said the scout, hurriedly. "They've potted Hannes Trumpf, I think. We must run for it."

"Stay where you are," was the stern order of the young Frenchman.

"Not a bit of it. I'm no fool," replied the robber, and he was moving off, when Pierre Bigot, ex-corporal of the Old Guard, suddenly started in front of him, and growled in a low, menacing tone:

"Did you hear the general speak?"

"General be —. We're all meat for the gallows if we stay," answered the other. "Get out of my way, fool. Ah!"

There was a dull thud and a short cry of agony as the robber fell, and Bigot observed, wiping his bayonet:

"I never did trust those ragamuffins. They'll run like—here comes the other—and the enemy have halted, too."

In fact, they could see another man stealing through the gloom toward them, and the noise of trampling feet had ceased in the woods.

The second man proved to be the very Hannes Trumpf, reported "potted," but actually unhurt; and he came quietly in and saluted St. George like an old soldier, saying:

"I've seen them all, general. It's the Students' League, with the one they call Devilshead to lead them. They've halted and seem to be waiting for something. There are at least three hundred."

St. George nodded thoughtfully.

"So! That fellow has laid some plan to beat us. Does he think that the Old Guard is not up to Prussian tricks? Have you any idea what they mean?"

"I think, general, there are more on the high road," replied the robber. "Our scout came in at dark and told us that a student had made a bet he would drive through to Darmstadt, but the coach has not come along yet."

St. George mused a moment and struck his forehead.

"I have it! An ambuscade! Why, comrades, this is like old times. I almost wish—but no—our service is over. We could, if we would, make these gentry sorry for their temerity; but as it is, let us retire and give them the road."

The robber again saluted.

"Pardon me, general," he said; "but you forget Schinderhannes and our men. They are on guard and in danger, if we leave them."

"Yes, general," interposed Bigot, eagerly. "This will be our last affair, let it be a good one that will be a credit to the Old Guard. We can beat those recruits in front there."

St. George seemed to be torn with conflicting emotions, for he muttered:

"True, we *might*—and then—there is no robbery here. It is all fair war. I wish—"

He turned to the robber.

"You have been a soldier. Where?"

"In the old army of Italy, general!" said the man, proudly.

"Ah! how then did you leave it?"

"My faith, general, I got tired after Marengo in the long peace, and I just walked away. But I know respect for an officer when I see one, and I'll stick by you to-night, general."

"Are there any soldiers among your comrades—by-the-by, what's your name?"

"Hannes Trumpf, general— No, sir, I am the only one, and you can depend on me to-night at all events."

"I will," said St. George. "See that you deserve our confidence; for you are serving with veterans of the Old Guard. Where is Schinderhannes? Have you seen him on your side?"

"No, general, I think—"

"Bang! Bang! Bang! BANG!!!"

Away off to the left front this time, followed by a distant cheer; and then came the rapid rattle of shots in a skirmish, all coming from the same place, for they could see the flashes through the dark wood.

The ex-soldiers began to rise up on their knees and look to the priming of their muskets; but St. George raised his hand again.

"Quiet, my children! Listen!"

"Crack! Rattle! Snap! Thud!"

Two bullets came tearing through the branches overhead, and one of them slapped into a tree behind.

"Those are not ours, and they have a dozen men to our four," said the Frenchman, coolly. "Now what's the matter with the other fellows in front?"

As if in answer to his query, they heard the trampling renewed, louder than before, and taking up a regular, rapid trot toward the firing on the high road.

Hannes Trumpf uttered a low exclamation of alarm.

"The others will be potted, general, surely, if we don't move."

"Silence!" was the sharp answer. "Do you think I never commanded an outpost before? Keep still, I tell you."

As he spoke he walked his horse slowly forward after the distant trampling, and presently could hear the sound of low commands in German, given to the excited students:

"Close up! Steady! Don't hurry so! Keep in the ranks! We've got them! No noise there!"

St. George smiled bitterly as he muttered to himself:

"No noise, indeed! All gabblers!"

And, indeed, there was a noise of murmuring voices, increasing every moment, showing that the eager students were in poor discipline for an excursion of the sort on which they were engaged.

Then he heard the thundering voice of Devilshead roar out:

"Charge the scoundrels! Forward!"

And just at that moment the shots began to go off again by the high road, and the students uttered a loud shout of triumph and opened a dropping fire, as they pressed through the woods.

Then St. George turned his horse, rode back and said, in a low voice:

"Now, men, spread out and follow them slowly. Not a shot fired till you hear my pistol. Then, one volley, and give them cold steel. Remember Waterloo!"

The old soldiers got silently upon their feet, grim and dogged, and obeyed the order to follow St. George, who rode slowly in front.

There was no enthusiasm among them; they had seen too many fights for that.

They were engaged in their last affair, and they were going to make it a clean sweep, that should do credit to the Old Guard.

Meantime, the firing in front had grown rapid and furious, and the wild shouts of the students showed they were advancing all the time.

Every now and then a single bullet whistled over the heads of the old soldiers, but it was clear that most of the firing was in the other direction.

Presently it blazed up into a furious volley, and a moment later a man came running in toward the French.

Had there been a recruit in those ranks, the man's life would not have been worth a rush; but, as it was, not a shot was fired till St. George called out:

"Halt! Who are you?"

"It was the voice of Schinderhannes that answered, joyfully:

"Ach Gott! it's you, at last. I thought we were all potted."

"What's that firing in front?" asked the young leader, shortly.

"Mein Gott! general, I think the fools are shooting each other. There were ten of them in a coach, and as soon as we five fired at them they all jumped out, took to the woods and sent a regular volley at us. Then we lay low and fired one or two shots, and presently we heard these others coming. I gave the word to slip out, and, by Jove! next thing we knew we were between two fires, so we had no occasion to make any noise ourselves."

And the robber chuckled heartily to himself as he finished.

Then St. George turned to his two friends and gave his orders:

"Louvè, take ten men and any of Schinderhannes's fellows you meet, to the right. De Lisle, take twenty to the left. The rest follow me. Close into line and charge."

A moment later, three dark squads of men were passing through the dark woods at a sling trot, and St. George rode on at a more rapid pace till he could see by the flashes of the rifles a dark, confused mass of men, divided into two parties and firing into each other.

It was clear that by some strange blunder the students had lost their bearings and imagined each other robbers.

Then the French leader gave the word, and the sharp deadly precision of rattle of his volley hushed the disorderly firing in a twinkling.

Then!

C-r-r-r-r-rash!!

Louvè's men poured in their quota in another quarter.

Again!

R-r-r-r-r-r-ramp!!

De Lisle followed suit and the students' fire was hushed, while a confusion of shouts and cries arose in the darkness.

And then!

"VIVE L'EMPEREUR!!!"

That cry had not been heard since the last charge at Waterloo!

With brows knit over stern pitiless eyes, with teeth clenched under grizzled mustaches, the three little squads of men, last remnant of the Old Guard, went sweeping through the woods, while the rabble of students fled before them like a flock of sheep, and were soon running down the highway toward Heidelberg, all shouting contradictory cries to each other.

Even Devilshead, brave as he undoubtedly was, found himself swept away in the wild unreasoning panic, engendered by the dark woods, the unfamiliar ground, and the unlooked-for suddenness of the fire in their rear.

The ex-guardsmen followed them a little way down the highway, fired a parting volley in token of triumph; and then Corporal Bigot saluted St. George in the open road and asked:

"Well, commandant, have we done our duty to-night?"

What could the general say but:

"Yes, indeed, Bigot."

Then up came Schinderhannes.

"General, my boys have been counting and find we've not a soul hurt, but the enemy are lying about all through the woods. Shall we finish the wounded and clean them out?"

The cold-blooded way in which the proposition was made caused even St. George to shudder slightly.

"No, no," he said, hastily. "This was a battle, not a burglary. Profane not this night by murder after the fight is over. Get the wounded together and leave them in our dell. We are to break up to-night, Schinderhannes. For the future you must take care of yourselves."

"I have done that before and I can do it again, general," said the veteran thief, good-humoredly. "But it will be somewhere outside of here; and they tell me that there are fine times for our people in Italy."

"You could not find a better spot," was the response of St. George. "And now, my children, come back to the dell and we will take one last cup to the memory of the Old Guard."

A murmur of gratified assent was the answer, as they all trooped back to the little dell. They knew they were safe from the irregular and undisciplined efforts of the students, and the fact that these latter had left the coach and horses behind them showed how utterly demoralized they were.

The robbers and soldiers had not been taking toll of travelers on the borders of Baden and Darmstadt for a year past without having accumulated store of clothing, food and valuables other than money, all of which they had hid away in their dell.

Therefore it was over a barrel of very good wine that night that they drank to the health of the Emperor they still adored; and the moon in her last quarter was rising over the tops of the pine trees, before what had been a band of haggard tatterdemalions separated to all quarters of the compass, decently clothed and shaven.

The forest band was broken up at last.

CHAPTER XIV.

BREAKING CAMP.

WHEN morning dawned on Heidelberg not a student was to be seen in the streets. Silently and abashed they had crept to their homes in the night; and as for Steinmark, he was utterly disheartened and dispirited, as he sought the chambers of his friend Von Retz, and found that enterprising youth gloomily smoking a pipe as big almost as himself.

Von Retz was too much dispirited even to blow rings. He shoved over the tobacco-box and a spare pipe to his friend, and they puffed away in silence till the first streaks of dawn came over the castle ruins.

Then at last Retz broke the ice by observing:

"We got a thrashing, Devilshead."

Steinmark groaned.

"If I could only have cut myself in two!

But it's no use grumbling."

"Not a bit. It was not as bad as Jena."

"Jena!"

Steinmark ground his teeth and growled a fierce malediction.

"To think that the cursed French should have been in our rear all the time. It was all that fool Berger, firing into us. He ought to have known who we were. And then that mob began to shoot without orders; and where we were or who was the enemy even I could not tell, till they charged us on three sides."

"There must have been at least a thousand of them," observed Retz in a meditative tone. "The woods seemed to be full of them."

"There were hardly fifty," growled Devilshead savagely. "I knew it and tried to rally our mob; but it was no use. They were like a regular flock of sheep."

Von Retz was silent for a while after this, and at last said:

"It was a strange affair. I wonder how it happened."

"I was afraid it would be so," replied the ex-cuirassier gloomily. "I told Berger his was the post of danger; but he was so confident that I let him go. I had thought they would have a strong force at the road, and told him to defend himself till I came. He must have thought we were the robbers, and my fools made the opposite mistake, so that between the two we were sucked dry like so many oranges."

More gloomy smoking, and at last Von Retz asked:

"Well, what shall we do now?"

"Go back and gather up the bodies of the killed," was the gruff reply, "unless the thieves have buried them."

Von Retz fidgeted a little on his seat and then said:

"Are you sure they were all thieves?"

Steinmark glanced up savagely.

"Of course. They were French; and what are French but the thieves of Europe, with a Corsican brigand to lead them to the plunder of empires?"

"It struck me," observed Von Retz in a hesitating way, "that they came on last night more like regular soldiers than thieves. And did you not hear the cry 'Vive L'Empereur?' It was the same we used to hear in 1814."

"I know it," gloomily answered the Prussian. "Do you think I'm deaf? But they are thieves all the same. The war's over and they are liable to be hung, every one of them."

Von Retz shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose so; but I swear they deserved a better fate."

Steinmark blazed up in wrath in a moment at the sound of praise for a Frenchman.

"A better fate? Nothing is too bad for them! Robbers! Wretches, without a spark of nobility in their natures! Murderers of wounded—What the devil's that? A coach, by all—!"

He broke off suddenly as the hollow rumble of a coach over the cobblestones of the narrow street sounded through the stillness.

Both went to the window just as the red rays of the rising sun poured a glory over the town, and beheld a singular sight.

A coach, drawn by four horses at a walk, was coming slowly down the incline of the steep street.

Each horse had a rider, and every rider was bandaged up with a wound of some sort. Arms in slings, heads bound up with bloody cloths, pale faces, drooping figures; such were the sorrowful postillions of Heidelberg's League of Steel.

The box held three more wounded men; another lay flat on the roof, lashed to his place; and bandaged heads were looking out of the windows.

And all wore the student dress.

White, red, green, blue, yellow caps were there, fraternizing in a common condition of woe.

Without a word, Steinmark and Retz went down stairs to find the street half full of people, staring at this lugubrious vehicle.

One of the postillions tried to smile as he said to Steinmark:

"You see, commandant, we are all back. Only one has let go the balusters for good."

"And who's that?" asked Devilshead, understanding his meaning.

"Berger. We lashed him fast on the roof of the coach. He got it in the head, first fire."

"What?" asked Steinmark, thinking of his attribution of blame to the dead man. "Was he killed the first?"

"Yes, commandant, before the real battle began. They picked him off the box before we knew they were near us, and that was what got us confused. We expected they would halt us and give us time to get out; but Berger's fall was the first thing we knew of them. Then we defended ourselves as well as we could, till I was hit in the arm; and after that I don't know how we got beaten."

Steinmark and the students crowded round the coach which they had set so much stress upon the very night before, and aided to extricate the unfortunate inmates, twelve in all—for there were six men inside, more or less severely hurt, several with bayonet stabs.

When they had taken down the cold body of poor Berger, Devilshead asked soberly:

"How did you get into this coach? Did you help each other?"

"Gott in Himmel, no," answered a student. "It was the Frenchmen did it. They took us to their fire; gave us wine; bound us up, and had us drinking a health to Napoleon. *Patz tausend!* if I'd known what nice fellows they were, I'd never have gone after them."

Steinmark frowned deeply, but he said nothing.

"Even that devil St. George was as kind and gentle as a woman," went on the student. "He seems to be a pretty good surgeon too; for he extracted three bullets, sewed up a gash in my shoulder, bandaged all of us that wanted it, and rode to the edge of town with Louvet and De Lisle, leading the horses, for fear they might run away with us."

Steinmark started eagerly.

"Rode here with you! Is he here now?"

"Oh, no. He's not fool enough for that. He left a message for you before he rode away, though."

"A message—for me?"

"Yes. It was at the edge of the hill before you come in here. He said to me: 'I am told you have a Prussian swaggerer among you that thinks he can fence. They call him Devilshead.' I answered 'You mean the Graf von Steinmark, I presume. He is no swaggerer; but he can fence against the devil himself.'"

"Did you say that, comrade?" asked Steinmark with feeling. "Thank you."

"Oh, yes. I was not going to let even him crow over us, and he seemed to see that he had been rude; for he said: 'Pardon, monsieur, I should have said Count von Steinmark. They tell me he is a good fencer.' I said again: 'None better,' and he laughed and asked: 'Will you give the gentleman a message?' I said: 'Certainly, if it be not an insult.' He smiled and answered: 'It is simply to tell him that the last of the Old Guard has marched out of the forest with the honors of war, and that he need be under no apprehension for the future safety of Prussian students. I shall never visit Heidelberg again!' That was all."

Devilshead listened attentively to the message, and nodded thoughtfully when it was concluded.

"So we have driven them out after all, even in defeat," he observed. "I wonder what he meant by the last of the Old Guard."

"Why, didn't you know?—of course not—how should you? Well, we found last night that there were only six real robbers in the place, with that scoundrel, Schinderhannes.

The rest were a number of French soldiers of the Old Guard, who broke off from the rest after Waterloo, and came to this forest to keep up the war single-handed. It seems that the Corsican made this St. George a general on the morning of the battle—to encourage him, I suppose—and that this was the only command he ever held. But he's gone now, and the League of Steel can cease."

"On the contrary," retorted Steinmark sharply, "I hold you all to your oaths, as strongly as ever. This man has done too much mischief to be allowed to live. You may all forsake me; but I will go on alone if need be, and never rest till I have crossed swords with St. George."

"And I am with you," cried Von Retz, as he clasped his hand.

"And I!" "And I!" responded a dozen or more Red Caps.

But the students with caps of other colors said nothing.

Steinmark smiled bitterly.

"I see," he said, "the old poison works. Well, gentlemen, go on with your old quarrels, if it please you. Let German jealousies distract the rest of you; we Prussians will work for the Fatherland, till we see it united. I have fought my last duel with any German."

"Ah! then, you mean that you are to turn *dummerjungen*?"

It was a White Cap who spoke, in a sneering tone.

Steinmark flushed to the roots of his hair, but controlled himself:

"When a man has taken first class at Bonn, Gottingen and Berlin, he can afford to be called 'blockhead' without fighting," he answered.

"Possibly," sneered the Austrian. "But I should say he would do well to go into the diplomatic service, or the church, where they forbid fighting. I had heard so much of Prussian military talent that I hardly thought to see you *here*, unwounded, to-day."

Steinmark's flush of anger had turned into a gray pallor, and the red streaks in the corners of his eyes seemed ready to burst as he glared at the Austrian student.

"You were pleased to say—" he began, in a low, grating voice, "that I—I do not understand you, sir. What honorable name shall I have the distinguished pleasure of saying?"

"My name is Von Beck, just gazetted to Jellachich's hussars," returned the other, coolly. "I start for Vienna this evening; but have time for a turn in Schneider's before I go."

All the students stared silently at the renowned Devilshead, to see if he would accept the challenge; and as they looked it was evident that he was passing through a severe mental struggle.

The sweat stood out on his forehead in great beads, and his jaw was set like a vise.

The Austrian—a man nearly as tall as himself—looked sternly at him, as if he expected to be attacked; but to the surprise of all no attack came.

Devilshead drew out his handkerchief, wiped away the sweat from his brow, and presently said in a low tone:

"You heard my promise. I fight no German till I have crossed swords with St. George. You can join your regiment safely, sir."

The Austrian curled his lip and walked away; while the students, after nudging each other, fell apart as if by mutual consent and dispersed without so much as a look at their lately idolized leader.

All but the Red Caps; but even they seemed to be utterly abashed and sullen over the—to them—unaccountable refusal of Steinmark to fight.

Von Retz seemed to be specially at a loss for an explanation, for he said:

"See here, Devilshead: this will not do. Here we Prussians have suffered the most in the University, and we shall have to fight a double allowance of duels to clear away this—"

He hesitated to find a word.

"Cowardice, you would say," mildly interposed Steinmark. "Don't be afraid to speak, Retz."

"No, not cowardice. We all know you could cut that Austrian to bits if you would. But it's nonsense, this sudden scruple of yours."

Steinmark sighed.

"Already! Have you forgotten our oath to the League of Steel? Taken but two days ago, and all have fallen from it but us. Let them go. The day will come when they will be glad to seek its shelter again, to keep out the inroads of ever-dangerous France. We swore to fight no German till St. George was punished."

"But they are all so much disgusted by last night's work that they have left us; and what are we to do?"

"Keep the oath of the League of Steel," was the firm answer.

"To do that we must leave Heidelberg."

"There are other universities in the Fatherland. Quit the place in a body, and they will respect you."

Von Retz shrugged his shoulders and walked off in a pet, but returned again almost immediately.

"What are you going to do, Devilshead?" he asked, suddenly.

"Take the Austrian's advice. He spoke more wisely than he knew."

"What do you mean?"

"That I have thrown away time enough at boy's play. I can do a man's work, and I am going to do it."

Von Retz looked puzzled.

"What! Are you actually going to throw yourself away into the church, and become a plodding parish priest?"

Steinmark smiled.

"Not exactly. I am going to St. Petersburg to see my uncle."

"What—the Graf von Blum—the ambassador there?"

"The same. He has been teasing me to come on as *attache* to the legation for nearly a year. I am tired of student life, and it has given me all I care to learn."

The Red Caps crowded round him in a moment, congratulating him, and Retz said, as he shook his hand:

"I wish I could do the same, old fellow; but my father insists that I go into the Guards, and there's no fun in the army now any more, since Napoleon's gone. But I wish you had taken the conceit out of that Austrian before you went."

Steinmark looked at him in a way that indicated considerable hidden meaning.

"There are more ways to kill a dog than hanging. I may have to give Austria a lesson yet, before I can finish those accursed French. Good-day, gentlemen."

CHAPTER XV.

ST. PETERSBURG.

ST. PETERSBURG in July. A wilderness of dust and droskies on the Newsky Prospekt; the Neva covered with boats.

Stately rows of marble palaces, and acres of squalid hovels, with piles of garbage rotting in the sun beside them.

The Winter Palace, deserted, the Admiralty swarming with workmen; the great white pile fantastically called the "Hermitage," where Catherine the Great enjoyed the pleasures of monastic life to the tune of a million of roubles a month; the Arsenal and its long rows of barracks; with soldiers, nobles, ladies, officers, police and *moujiks* everywhere.

Especially the *moujik*, with his long beard and his simple, half-Tartar face, his sheep-skin haftan, which he turns wool inside in winter, his square cap and his ever lively vermin.

The *moujik* is the flour that makes the Russian bread. You can turn him also into cakes and pies of all sorts, according to cooking and mixture of ingredients.

Varnish him with sugar and stick a few French raisins in him, and he makes a fair diplomat or a clerk in a bureau; fill him with fruit [of other lands, imported for the purpose, and he stands out, a respectable noble; bake him hard in the fire, and you have a good soldier, salted with niter; let the dough fall flat, and you have the police biscuit, waterproof and good for any climate.

But no flour, no pastry; no *moujik*, no Russian society.

Out on the Newsky Prospekt in the summer afternoon the droskies were racing and jingling away.

The nobles' vehicles, that is.

For racing is strictly against the rules of St. Petersburg, and the police arrest rude people driving beyond a certain pace, as they do in our Central Park.

That is to say in about the same way. If Prince Dashamoff has a new span of Orloff trotters on which he has bet a thousand roubles to beat the gray English team of Baron Tearowski, the two nobles generally have their race, and make an extra bet on beating the mounted policemen to their own court-yards.

Once inside there, the jurisdiction of the street police gives way to that of the *dvornik*, a sort of porter, who is supposed to watch over the political morals of the inmates and report to the chief of police if there be any treasonable meetings inside.

Generally, however, the *dvornik* is a very respectful person. It is only when the Nihilists make trouble as they do at intervals to-day that the disagreeable side of the *dvornik* comes into play.

And in 1816 there were no Nihilists. Alexander the First was on the throne, and the *moujiks* adored him. They called him the "White Czar," "Father of his People" and such like pretty names, and they set Moscow on fire to please him and drive out the "French devils."

Alexander had led the Cossacks to Paris, and helped to cage the only man who had ever led a foreign army to the Kremlin.

Therefore all the Russians were very proud and happy; or at least people said they were, which was the same thing to the rest of the world.

Except diplomats who had any business to do with the Czar.

They complained that his Imperial Majesty had become a sort of recluse since the war, and that he was a prey to melancholy of some kind.

There were ugly stories about that the Czar was troubled with attacks of a malady that

was by some thought hereditary with the Romanoffs.

At least the French ambassador, Monsieur le Duc de Millefleurs, used to shrug his shoulders and take snuff in a mysterious manner, like a man who could say a good deal if he chose, when the Czar's "melancholy" was spoken of in his house.

It was only the diplomats that mentioned it, and they never save to their own suite in confidence. No Russian would admit, even to himself, that the Czar was getting flighty, and no ambassador would talk of it to the representative of a rival or friendly power.

It was a ticklish subject, and only proper for confidential notes to the Home Office, sent by special courier.

The Duke de Millefleurs was one of the old noblesse of France. He had been compelled to earn his living during the Directory and Empire by giving lessons in deportment in the foggy climate of England, which he abominated, though he was glad to get the guineas of the vulgar "rosbifs" in those days. In fact, ill-natured folks said he had been a dancing-master.

But when Louis XVIII, King of France by the grace of Russia, Prussia, and the Holy Alliance, came to his own after the fall of the Corsican, the exiled duke resumed his title and some of his estates, and was sent as Minister to Russia, with a fat slice out of the Civil List to console him for the loss of the rest.

On this July day you might have seen him, small, yellow, weazened, bedecked with the order of St. Louis, in a gorgeous, open phaeton, with six cream-colored horses, while beside him sat a singularly handsome young man in fashionable clothes, who seemed to be on confidential terms; for the old duke addressed him always as: "My dear Dion," or "dear nephew."

"Yes, that is the Winter Palace," he was saying, "and I fancy it will be shut up a long time, my dear Dion."

"Why so, monsieur my uncle?"

"Because, from what I hear—but remember, Dion, this is a state secret."

"I can be dumb, monsieur."

"I know it. You are discreet—very discreet or you would not be here. But the fact is, Dion, the other was found dead there one evening."

The duke shrugged expressively and took snuff in a diplomatic way.

"You understand, my dear?"

"Not exactly."

"I mean the Emperor Paul."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes; you must remember it."

"No, sir; I was only a child, then. It was under the consulate, you know."

"True, true. Well, my dear, you know he was found dead in bed, and they said it was apoplexy."

"And was it not?"

The duke took snuff again.

"Apoplexy does not leave a black ring round the neck, my dear nephew."

"How! Do you mean he was killed, assassinated, strangled?"

"I mean nothing officially, Dion; but between us two, Dolgoroucki told me once that Count Orloff's thumb was nearly bitten in half on the morning after Paul died, and he was first gentleman of the bed-chamber, and the strongest man in Russia. If there had been a struggle to finish a maniac quietly, Orloff was a good man to lead the party."

"But what has that to do with the present Czar, monsieur my uncle?"

Once more Millefleurs took snuff. It was a habit he had when he was considering how to give a dry answer.

"Well, dear Dion, it is said that the present Czar was waiting in a room of the same palace when Paul had his fit of apoplexy, and he has had the place shut up almost constantly ever since."

"Indeed. Then you think—?"

"I think nothing, dear Dion. But you know that these Russians are very superstitious. In fact, it is more than whispered that old Peter's tricks repeat themselves at intervals in the family."

"And what are those?"

"Oh, fancies, imaginations, fits of epilepsy, and so forth. You know Paul was more than suspected of being mad, and they say his son may go the same way some day, if he be not already—but I say nothing."

"It is not necessary, my uncle," was the reply, with a faint smile. "You are comprehended perfectly. So the Czar keeps to the Summer Palace."

"Absolutely. It is a pleasanter place you know, Dion; as you will say when you are presented."

A slight frown crossed the face of the younger man.

"I wish it were over," he said shortly.

"No, no, my dear nephew, that will be only the beginning. Believe me, you are born to succeed as a diplomat."

The young man did not seem to be pleased by the compliment.

"I suppose it is the only career now," he said bitterly; "but to one who was bred up to

arms under the best soldier in Europe it is a tame prospect."

The duke smiled and shrugged.

"How impetuous you are! Can you not see that the map of Europe is settled for at least forty years to come? We have had a surfeit of fighting, and Red Caps, and liberty, and all that sort of thing, my nephew, and now we have settled down to the natural order of things ordained by Heaven."

"And what is that?" asked the young man cynically.

"The order of the pyramid. Above all, the king; then the nobles in order of number; princes, dukes, marquises, counts, barons, chevaliers; then the honest *bourgeois*, and on the bottom the *canaille*, the rabble your fanatics called the people."

"Then in your order of society, after all, the people are the foundation of the State," interposed Dion, sharply.

The duke shrugged his shoulders.

"As you please. But I know that we are too heavy to be overthrown. An earthquake hardly shakes a pyramid."

"It may split it in half, uncle."

"Ah, *peste!* You are too logical with your red republican education. You forget, Dion, that you are the Count de Mauprat, one of the old noblesse—none of the *parvenu* stock of that Corsican upstart. You have had your fun with him—eh, my faith, I had fun in my young days, too—and it is all forgiven. After all, you are my brother's grandson; and if I cannot leave you a duke, I can at least advance your favor with his majesty and push you in the diplomatic service."

Dion was silent for a little, and then he said more plainly:

"You have been kinder to me than I deserve, and as for my sister, Madame de—"

"Hush!" cried the duke, peevishly. "Did I not say that name must be forever buried? Mademoiselle de Mauprat is my grand niece, and was never either wife or widow. That is understood. Do you hear, Monsieur de Mauprat?"

The younger man averted his face and gazed absently at the blue Neva as if in thought. At last he said abstractedly:

"I know you have said so; but why?"

The duke patted his snuff-box in an impatient way.

"You always want to know the last of every thing. Suppose I were to tell you, you would only be made unhappy by it."

"Unhappy!"

De Mauprat smiled bitterly.

"As if I could ever be happy again."

"*Peste! mon cher*, you talk nonsense. Why should you not? You are young; the Mauprat estate was one of the few the Jacobins left untouched—"

"Thanks to the efforts of our dead hero benefactor, St. George!" said De Mauprat, warmly. Millefleurs shrugged his shoulders with a grimace of the old school.

"What of it? He was but a fencing-master after all, and under a usurper too."

"He saved my sister and me from a death by hunger," answered the other; "and it was his son who taught me all I know of arms and art. It is not every man who can say 'I was decorated at Jena, or Borodino, or Austerlitz! France can never forget those names, monsieur.'"

The duke listened frigidly, and then observed in a dry tone:

"Your sentiments would do honor to a melodrama of the Porte Saint Martin. Are you aware of the parentage of M. le Comte de St. George, as he called himself? I mean the father, not the son, my dear Dion."

The young man hesitated.

"No. He came, I believe, from Martinique, where his family had a coffee estate."

The duke laughed a shrill little cackle, as he echoed:

"Martinique! Ay! Where Mademoiselle Tascher de la Pagerie was born, who became Beauharnais and Bonaparte, till you Corsican got tired of her and tried to climb into the seat of St. Louis by marrying Marie Louise of Hapsburg. But no, my dear, you are wrong. It was not from Martinique he came; but from San Domingo, where I had an estate once on a time, next to that of the Marquis of St. George."

Mauprat looked interested.

"Was there then a marquis? I never heard my benefactor speak of his father. I did not know even if he were living or dead."

Millefleurs cackled again.

"Oh, he was dead enough. In fact, all the St. George family were massacred, to a soul, in the black insurrection. I was there myself and nearly got caught by the devils. As it was, I lost more than five hundred sugar hands, and I shall never see them again."

"But how then did St. George come to France?" asked Mauprat.

"St. George? I tell you there was no St. George left. The blacks roasted them alive; for they hated the marquis and his wife; especially the wife."

"Monsieur, my uncle, please explain. I do not yet see what you mean?"

"Oh, it's simple enough. Did you never notice that your St. George was a very dark-skinned man, with curly hair?"

"Yes. He was extremely handsome, and so was his son. They had dark eyes and jet-black hair. My own is not bad, you know, but it will never curl as theirs did, especially that of the old count. And his teeth were particularly fine."

The duke burst out laughing.

"Innocent that you are! Those *sang melé*'s are all the same."

"*Sang melé!*"

"Ah! does a light break in at last, my dear? Yes. Your St. George was the son of my old friend, the marquis by nature; but his mother was a slave—a very nice little girl, too—I remember St. George had good taste. But the fact remains that your fencing-master protector had quite a tinge of African blood in his veins, and it must have descended to his son. I heard that the youngster was a sort of chief among the insurgents before he went to France, where people knew no better. He there took the name of the marquis and married some white woman, a *grisette* I suppose. Therefore, you see, my dear Dion, why I think it best for my niece to drop the title of St. George."

"Again, uncle, I fail to quite comprehend."

De Mauprat looked angry as he spoke and compressed his lips.

"Can you not see?"

"See what?"

"Why, the deuce! are you not in the full possession of your senses? It was well enough at the court of the Corsican, where no one, except your Empress, was a creole or knew anything about creole life: but now, *parbleu!* it is different."

"How different?"

"*Morbleu!* my nephew, how you talk! Why, we others of the old stock are frequently connected with creoles, and we know all the old names. Madame de Saint George would be a name to excite inquiry everywhere; and they would soon find out that my niece had married a man with a taint of black blood in his veins. That would ruin her chances of a good match forever among us, my nephew. No, no, she is young enough yet to pass for mademoiselle; so let this dream fade away and forget that the name of St. George ever existed."

Dion de Mauprat sat gloomily biting his lower lip, as they rolled along on the Newsky Prospekt. He was thinking the same bitter thoughts which came to many a Frenchman after the fall of Napoleon, about the irrevocable past, lost forever and ever, and the future, in which every thing was to be just as he longed it should not be.

Then, as they crossed the bridge to go toward the Summer Palace, he asked his uncle:

"Where now, monsieur?"

"I am going to visit my friend the Minister of State, and find when I can present you and mademoiselle to his majesty," was the reply. "You must lose yourselves, and come to the surface as De Mauprat; for on my faith, Dion, you have made the name of St. George a little too conspicuous for safety."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LEVEE.

THE marble terraces around the Summer Palace were fragrant with huge vases of exotics and crowded with passengers under the rays of the full moon, which rendered unnecessary the glare of the flambeaux held by some five hundred glittering giants, called "Cuirassiers of the Imperial Guard."

These burly warriors stood bolt upright, stiff as statues, in the places where they had been posted by their sergeants, and confined their energies to the one task of keeping bright the light of the torches they held.

The guests trooped up the marble steps by dozens, the men gorgeous in bullion aiguillettes, bright uniforms, clanking swords and spurs, or the velvet of diplomatic full dress, with cocked hats, helmets, shakos, under their arms; the ladies all rustling and fluttering in brocade trains, with waving plumes above the jewels in their hair.

It was a state reception and the Czar was reported to be unusually gracious and cheerful, at which all loyal Russians rejoiced and the rival diplomats rubbed their hands.

The ambassadors were to present their friends, and every envoy had a long string of ambitious strangers, anxious for a sight of his Imperial Majesty, Alexander, autocrat of all the Russias, in a lucid interval.

There was a squabble about precedence, of course, and the Czar had undertaken to settle it by a simple method. The ambassadors were to be presented in the order of the antiquity of their kingdoms; France first; then England; then Austria; Prussia last. As for Spain, Portugal and Turkey, there was a good deal of trouble about them; for it was hard to decide between the antiquity of the first two, and the Turkish ambassador insisted on going in ahead of both, on the ground that his was a "first-class power."

However, all these squabbles were confined to the ante-chambers, and the only trace of them in the throne room came from the absence of

some very punctilious official, who had gone away in a huff at the new rules.

Monsieur le Duc de Millefleurs, splendid in purple velvet, nearly hidden by gold lace, with the cross of St. Louis, the collars of the Golden Fleece, the Holy Ghost and a dozen other orders, on his breast, presented the appearance of a venerable and decrepit ape of the anthropoid variety, dressed up to take post by a barrel organ.

He was received, however, with great favor by the Czar, who was kind enough to observe, as the duke kissed his hand:

"Quite a change, *M. le Duc*, to have a seigneur of the old school here, after the rough *sans-culottes* of a few years since. I rejoice to see you."

Monsieur de Millefleurs grinned delightedly and answered:

"France, under her ancient kings, is the devoted friend of Russia. Permit me to present to your majesty my nephew, *M. le Comte de Mauprat*, a gentleman who unfortunately can only inherit my estates and not my title, inasmuch as he takes descent through the female line by my brother's daughter, his mother."

The Czar turned his gentle, kindly face on De Mauprat, and scanned him with some interest.

"You are yet young, monsieur," he said; "and I suppose you served with the Austrians in the late war, like others of your ancient nobility, against the usurper, Bonaparte."

The young man flushed crimson; but the duke skillfully interposed, with the privilege of an ambassador and the tact of a Frenchman bred in the saloons of the old noblesse.

"I beg your majesty to pardon my nephew," he said; "but the fact is, he had a romantic notion about fighting for France, right or wrong; and now that he is back under the lilies, he will forget the follies of the tricolor and red cap."

The emperor smiled gravely.

"I salute Monsieur de Mauprat, and hope we shall see him often. Is he attached to the embassy, duke?"

"He is my auxiliary *attache*, your majesty, and will be my best secretary when he gets over his camp-habits of punctuality and going to bed early."

The emperor smiled slightly and the duke took snuff, while Mauprat bowed silently and fell back, grinding his teeth to think how he had been obliged to show tacit sorrow at the very memories of which he was most entirely proud.

Then the ambassador took by the hand a young lady of such beauty that even Alexander, used as he was to lovely women, started and stared with undisguised admiration as Millefleurs said:

"Your majesty, my niece, Mademoiselle de Mauprat."

The emperor looked a moment; then stepped down, took the lady by the hand and kissed her on both cheeks in imperial fashion—in fact, a little more heartily than etiquette, which prescribes only the right cheek, demands.

Then Alexander said aloud:

"Monsieur le Duc, I shall never forgive you if you do not bring mademoiselle frequently to court, if, as I suppose, she lives at the Embassy. Is it so?"

"Your majesty, my niece has very kindly consented to oversee my bachelor *menage*. She will be proud and happy to come often."

"And you, mademoiselle," continued the Czar, smiling; "you are not, like your brave brother, inoculated with the fantastic notions of those red republicans. You are, of course, a legitimist."

Diane de Mauprat—for we must call her so in deference to the wish of a member of the old noblesse—raised her dark eyes to those of the autocrat, and answered, quietly:

"Of course, sire. In these days it is the fashion to call the men who betrayed France, her best friends. For my part, I wear my colors where all the world can see them if they will."

The emperor looked more narrowly at her dress—he had only studied her face so far—and laughed heartily.

"My faith, duke," he said gayly, "you are not half as sharp eyed as a gentleman of the old noblesse ought to be in the school of intrigue. Look then at the brooch in the corsage of mademoiselle, and her bouquets."

The duke looked and turned very red. He was touched in his tenderest point. A rank legitimist, he hated every emblem of Republican France; and yet, here, under his very nose, was an audacious girl who had openly displayed the tricolor in two places before all the court.

In the brooch which held the little bunch of violets in her corsage, were three large stones, ruby, diamond, sapphire, arranged like a tricolor flag, in square setting; while the bouquet of lilies in her hand bore a regular flag in the midst, made of red roses and blue gentianellas.

"And the violets too," observed the Czar, highly amused. "That is the emblem, I believe, of your exile of St. Helena;—is it not so, mademoiselle?"

Diane's only answer was to raise one of the violets to her lips and kiss it.

"A Bonapartist to the core," said the Czar good humoredly, while the ancient diplomatist was at his wits' end for an excuse. "M. le

Duc, it is more than ever necessary that mademoiselle should come to court frequently. She needs to be cured of this romantic dream; and by my faith I am tempted to undertake the cure myself. I am quite a good physician in such cases."

The duke bowed almost to the earth in his gratitude, and the Czar took up his old post and relapsed into that absent frigid look which sovereigns assume when passing through a wearisome ceremony.

Diane and her brother passed on; the ambassador had no more people to present, and their audience was over; so that they were at liberty to mingle with the crowd of gazers, as the Austrian ambassador brought up his quota of blonde Viennese to the august presence.

Millefleurs stood smiling and tapping his snuff-box, whispering occasionally comments to his nephew, as the Germans advanced to be presented.

Then the Prussian ambassador, a portly, stern-looking man, with white hair, came up; and the duke whispered to Dion:

"My faith, my nephew, that man is a German swine. I can stomach an Austrian. He is a gentleman. But these Prussians are vulgar *parvenues*, and this Blum is the worst of all. See what a great butcher of a fellow he has just taken to himself for his under secretary of legation. That is he, being presented now. My faith, he ought to be cutting down trees, not handling a pen."

De Mauprat looked, and saw a grandly handsome young man, in diplomatic uniform, bowing before the Czar. He was over six feet high, with powerful frame, a stern but handsome face, a close-cut mustache over a bull-dog jaw, and his hair was already growing thin on the forehead, though he seemed not over twenty-six or seven.

"Who is he?" he whispered.

"Oh, I forget the name, 'Marc' or some name like it. Listen as old Blum presents him."

The harsh grating voice of Count von Blum could be heard, saying:

"I have the honor to present to your majesty my nephew, Graf von Steinmark, late of the Third Cuirassiers of our army, and wearer of the Iron Cross for valor at Waterloo, where he took two eagles from the French, single-handed. He has determined to try diplomacy for the future, and I trust your majesty will honor my choice by approval."

Alexander smiled faintly at the pompous address, but said not unkindly to Steinmark:

"You look like an honest gentleman. What would you do against such men as Talleyrand or Metternich, if you were pitted against them to make a treaty?"

The young *attache* looked up frankly at the Czar.

"It would depend on my orders as to the terms I was to get, sire."

"Very well answered. But suppose they refused them? How would you do then?"

"Send a courier home to the office to tell them to prepare for war, if we were ready, sire."

"But suppose you were not ready?"

Steinmark hesitated a little.

"I shall never have to make such treaty, sire."

"Indeed! Why not?"

"Because, by the time I attain the rank of ambassador, we shall be ready for any one, sire."

Alexander nodded with a look of some surprise.

"Young gentleman, you have not made a mistake," he said, gravely. "You will make your mark some day in diplomacy."

Then he inclined his head slightly and Steinmark passed on, while Millefleurs whispered:

"Just like his Prussian insolence, when their first king was only a marquis two hundred years ago."

But De Mauprat was not listening to him. He was staring at Steinmark with an interest that he found it hard to conceal.

"And that's Devilshead," he muttered to himself. "Uncle against uncle; nephew against nephew. Ah, indeed! my pretty unknown of the forest too. A strange meeting!"

For Count von Blum was saying in German—he never did or would use French in Russia and the Czar talked both languages:

"Next, allow me to present my niece, the Fraulein von Steinmark. She has come here on a visit to my wife, who is unfortunately not well enough to attend the levee to-night."

He rather passed over Emilia, an example not imitated by the Czar, who seemed to be struck with the girlish beauty of the young German and kissed her on the forehead in a paternal way, saying:

"Mademoiselle von Steinmark, I fear that you will not find it as easy to leave St. Petersburg as you did to enter it."

Emilia blushed deeply and was only able to falter out:

"Why not, sire?"

"My faith, because some one will be wanting to catch and keep you for his own," said the Czar smiling. "If you don't understand the reason, I recommend you to consult your glass."

And this time the Czar kissed her cheek and sent her off, crimson with renewed blushes; while all the ladies in court began to whisper to each other and criticise her to their hearts' content.

Then she passed on, took her brother's arm, and presently they found themselves in the crowd, face to face with Dion and Diane de Mauprat.

The French brother and sister had this advantage, that they were prepared for the encounter; for they had watched the others while the Prussian ambassador presented them.

Not so Otto and Emilia. To them the recognition came like the shock of a thunderbolt, and in spite of all the restraint exercised on them by the surroundings, each changed color and uttered a slight cry.

Otto's exclamation was singular.

"I knew I'd see them."

Emilia could only stammer:

"Von Moor! Diane!"

Then she recovered herself, and said to the lady with a stereotyped smile:

"Madame la Comtesse, is it you?"

But the other lady drew back her hand with a cold forbidding look.

"Pardon, mademoiselle, it is a mistake. I do not know you."

Then Steinmark must needs come to his sister's aid, blundering out:

"But surely it is Madame de St. George. I cannot be mistaken."

The quavering voice of the old duke interposed:

"My dear sir, this lady is my niece, Mademoiselle de Mauprat, and I am the Duc de Millefleurs, Plenipotentiary of France. You will perceive you have made a mistake."

Steinmark stared; but he had no resource but to bow and withdraw in confusion, apologizing for what he called:

"A mistake, owing to resemblance. I beg pardon, mademoiselle."

The lady frigidly inclined her head; but his keen eye observed that she was trembling all over, while the eyes of her brother were glowing like live coals as he looked at the tall Prussian.

Steinmark knew him well enough.

The marvelous likeness between the twins could not be concealed by the difference in dress, and Otto knew the Demon Duelist in a moment.

He took his sister back into one of the little waiting rooms that abounded round the audience chamber, and placed her on a sofa; for she was nearly fainting with emotion.

Then he said quietly to her:

"It is they; and they have resumed their true names. Perhaps it is best."

"Oh, Otto," she stammered, "don't kill him, don't even fight him, for my sake. What shall I do?"

He smiled bitterly.

"Don't be afraid. A Baden duel is no crime in Russia; and he is safe from anything but my sword. And that is not as good as his yet. I must wait till I have learned more. There is to be a meeting of masters here soon. Then we shall see."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SECRET THRUST OF MILLEFLEURS.

MONSIEUR LE DUC DE MILLEFLEURS watched the big Prussian and his sister thread their way through the crowd, and when they were out of hearing turned to his nephew, and said in a low tone:

"Monsieur mon neveu, you see the advisability of my course."

De Mauprat made no answer. He was still watching the tall form of Devilshead, and his eyes were glowing with a fire that would have looked dangerous to those who knew him.

But his uncle did not know him except as a member of his family, and that went for little.

Then the duke whispered to Diane: "Mademoiselle de Mauprat, compose your nerves; or people will be apt to look at you; and we of the old stock desire to be composed above all things. Excitement is for the *canaille*."

She shrugged her white shoulders and replied with superb indifference:

"It is chilly in this huge room. I hate the Russian climate."

He grinned approvingly.

"You are right: it is an abominable exile, to which I only submit out of love for the king. *Apropos*, you have met that gentleman before; where was it, my niece?"

"In Baden," she answered in a low voice.

"I—met him, and he knew me."

"That is to say, you never were in Baden, and the gentleman was very much mistaken. I see. Monsieur de Mauprat, a word in your ear."

"It is unnecessary, my uncle. I have determined what to do," was the frigid reply of the young man.

The duke suspended a pinch of snuff on its way to his nose; looked at his nephew in a singular way, and then inhaled the titillating powder with an air of some annoyance muttering:

"Decidedly the young folks are not what they used to be; but he has the true air *au grand seigneur*."

Presently the Austrian ambassador came smiling up and asked to be presented to mademoiselle, with whom he entered into a gay conversation, which she sustained with the peculiar calm half disdain of the grand lady, when the duke found an opportunity to beckon De Mauprat to one side, and said to him gravely:

"Monsieur my nephew, in my time, when an old man addressed a young one, he was listened to with respect and not interrupted. I had the honor just now to ask for a word in your ear. I repeat the request."

De Mauprat flushed slightly.

"Monsieur my uncle, I apologize for my rudeness, and await your communication."

"It is not a communication," replied Millefleurs more placably. "It is a question. Can you fence, monsieur, my nephew?"

Dion looked at his uncle a moment.

"A little," he answered dryly.

"Indeed? That will not do. Did you ever hear of the secret thrust of Millefleurs?"

De Mauprat shook his head.

"Aha! then I must teach it to you," was the pleased reply. "These boys think they can fence nowadays; but it is all nonsense compared to the old masters and the old noble houses. Why, every one of us had our secrets of fence. That scamp St. George had a good one, by-the-by, and taught it to his—well, that dark gentleman who cut such a spread in the Corsican's time as a fencing-master. It was in fact very much like ours, a parry in prime and a return in carte, by a turn like demi-circle."

"I know that return," observed the other quietly. "In fact, I have made a little improvement on it myself."

The duke shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course. You young men always try to teach your elders. Wait till I show you the Millefleurs return, and you will open your eyes. I used it when I pinked the Duc de Boissy in the year '75. But, as I was saying, my nephew, it is necessary to stop the mouth of this Prussian butcher, and I rely on you to do it. Our family must not be compromised on account of too much talk."

De Mauprat nodded quietly.

"I will stop his talking. Be tranquil, my uncle. It will be attended to."

The duke looked pleased.

"You come of the true stock after all, and will do your duty. But you must not arrange this affair till I have taught you the family thrust to-morrow morning. I tell you it is an infallible way to run your man through the bowels."

The old noble looked about as capable of a duel as a mummy; but his eyes gleamed as he spoke, and it was easy to see that he had once been an enthusiast in arms.

De Mauprat stifled a yawn.

"It is a parry in prime and a quick return in low carte, is it not, this thrust?" he said inquiringly.

"Yes, yes, exactly. How did you know it, my nephew?"

"It belongs to the old-fashioned style," responded the other coldly. "Nowadays we rarely use primes, except from Spanish guard, and then—I at least—always cut a demi-circle and end with a disarm."

The duke stared, shrugged, took a pinch of snuff, and turned away with the muttered remark:

"Decidedly times have changed. But he has the grand air after all."

De Mauprat smiled bitterly as he saw him go off, and muttered in turn:

"And it is for the favor of feeble imbeciles like this that I have lost my identity and deceived my patron and the Emperor. But I will take out all my revenge on Devilshead."

He went over to his sister, and she took his arm and strolled off among the people.

Presently she said abruptly:

"What did the duke say?"

"He told me I must stop the mouth of this Prussian. Why did you not tell me you had seen him at Baden, Diane?"

"And why did you not tell me you had met that fair-haired wax doll, his sister?" she retorted sharply.

"Because I hardly thought it worth while to trouble you on so small an affair," he answered changing color a little under her searching glance. "But why do you call her a wax doll? To my mind she is full of soul, and almost worthy of France. She has courage like a little lioness; for she never blenched before Schindelhannes and all our men."

"Very well," she answered composedly. "I suppose then, it is settled that you are to forgive and forget Waterloo and the countrymen of Blucher, and bask in the blue eyes of Emilia von Steinmark. I congratulate you."

"Spare your pains," he replied. "Mademoiselle is beautiful, good and *spirituelle*; but I can never love her, Diane."

"And why not?"

"Because I must kill her brother." He said it as coolly as the duke had done before him.

"And why must you kill him?"

She asked the question in a stifled voice and turned her head away.

"Because he knows you, and because it is necessary no one shall know you as other than Mademoiselle de Mauprat, till you are married."

"I shall never marry again. My heart is buried in the tomb with one my uncle calls *sang me*."

She ground her white teeth as she spoke and went on:

"Oh how I hate this pomp and ceremony, this sham and pretense! I would rather ride in a tumbrel of the Grand Army, as we used to do, Dion, in the old days, than live in the midst of this splendor and in dread of discovery all the time."

He nodded his head.

"So would I, but it is useless to wish. Here we are and all is peace. We must keep our places, or be trampled on by the Prussians. Tell me how you met this man."

"I met him at Baden, at Stephanie von Werder's house. He was an old lover of hers, she boasted. I had heard of him as a duelist, and I knew you might have to meet him, so I challenged him to fence, to find out his points beforehand."

"Aha! what are they?"

His tone was fiercely eager.

"No, no," she answered, firmly. "If I tell you, it will only be on a condition, my brother."

"Name it, Diane."

"That you do not kill him."

He frowned at her.

"What! Are you turning over? It is you then that are in love, perhaps?"

"Not so, Dion."

Her tone was quite calm now.

"I do not tell you not to fight him, if our uncle thinks best; but I say you must not kill him. If you refuse to promise, find out his points for yourself, brother."

She could be as firm as he, and the Demon Duelist knew it.

"Well," he said, slowly; "I have no special spite against him; except that he is a Prussian. If he will swear to keep his tongue still I will not kill him. Will that do?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"You must disarm him."

"Well, I will. Is that enough?"

"Yes. I will trust you."

"Come then, what are his points? Can he use the small-sword?"

"No. He has only Italian style, with a glizade, trying to steal in on one unawares."

"Good. I know that. Beat on his blade and a straight lunge in carte, is the play for him."

"Not so. You must not kill him, remember."

"Well, what then?"

"He holds his foil with the thumb down the hilt, and a gap between that and his fingers."

"I understand. Effective parry in tierce will send it flying."

"Exactly. But with the saber he is strong in a rally. He has the force of a giant, and he beat down my guard at last, and stunned me with a down cut."

"The deuce!"

The exclamation sounded like one of decided admiration.

"And yet, you have quite as good a guard as most men."

"But I cut him a dozen times on arm and breast, for he makes false cuts. Only in a duel he would take punishment and come in, hot

for his revenge, at any cost. So be careful, my brother."

"I will," he responded, thoughtfully. "Thanks, my sister. I am very glad our poor, dead benefactor taught us both all he knew. I will attend to our friend from Prussia."

She lingered and asked:

"And are you sure you can disarm him, Dion?"

"I will stake my life on it."

Then they mingled with the other guests, and after awhile the duke came to them and told them it was time to go home; the carriage was at the gate, and he had dispatches to write, and needed Dion.

They drove away from the great Summer Palace to the French Embassy, where Mademoiselle de Mauprat retired to her room; and the duke, who had been unable to digest his nephew's nonchalant way of disposing of the famous "Millefleurs secret thrust," said to him:

"Come, Monsieur de Mauprat, I am, it is true, an old man; but I was counted quite a swordsman in my day. Let us take a turn with the foils, and if I find you can parry the family thrust, I will own that times have changed."

His nephew smiled faintly as he followed his uncle to a saloon where the duke produced foils and masks, and cried, as he threw his weakened figure on guard:

"Now, monsieur, my nephew, let us see what you can do. The attack is with you, as the younger."

Mauprat laughed and made a simple lunge in carte, which the old duke parried in prime and came back with the renowned "Millefleurs secret thrust."

In another moment his foil was struck from his hand by a strong parade in tierce, and Mauprat regarded the astounded old noble with a dry look.

"Monsieur my uncle," he said, as he picked up the fallen foil and presented it to the other, "I hope you will allow I can fence a little. Shall we go to bed?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MEETING.

OTTO VON STEINMARK was busy at the Prussian embassy, next day, copying dispatches for the courier, when the usher informed him that a gentleman wished to see him.

"A gentleman from the French embassy, *mein herr*," he added. "Here is his card."

Steinmark took the card and read on it in delicate Italian text:

"*M. le Marquis de Pont Noir.*"

"Tell him I am busy and ask him to call again, Hannes. I must finish this copying."

"Please the gracious *herr*, I told the gentleman that already; but he said that he must see you on a matter of importance to yourself."

Otto threw down his pen with an impatient German oath.

"Send him in, then. These French scoundrels have no idea of such a thing as business."

But it was with perfect, though frigid politeness that he received the Frenchman, who proved to be a dapper little man, full of pretense and affectation, fitter for the silk breeches of the eighteenth century than the broadcloth in which he was arrayed.

The marquis opened his business however without undue prolixity.

"I come, *M. le comte*," he said in French, "on the part of my friend, M. le Comte de Mauprat, who considers himself aggrieved that you should have offered to speak to mademoiselle, his sister, without an introduction."

Steinmark knit his brows.

"I had the honor, last night, to admit to your ambassador that I was mistaken, and to apologize. Is not that sufficient?"

"That was only the duke, monsieur; but my friend De Mauprat wishes to be assured that you are convinced you were mistaken, and that you will, if necessary, say so in public."

"I hardly think that proper, marquis," was the rather impatient reply. "I am not accustomed to babble."

"Then of course monsieur will be charmed to aid in preserving the honor of a lady by writing a note to the count, stating that you regret the fact of your defective vision, which caused you to mistake mademoiselle for some other person."

"My defective vision!"

Steinmark could hardly help a laugh at the

idea; but a moment later his antipathy to France got the better of him, and he snapped:

"I'll write no such letter. If the count wishes to pick a quarrel with me, tell him I know him well and do not fear him."

Pont Noir grinned politely.

"But that is just what De Mauprat will not permit, monsieur. He insists that your pretense of knowing him is an impertinence, and that you never saw him."

"No more I did; till last night. But I know him and he knows me. Still, monsieur, I will never breathe the knowledge to a person, unless the count forces me."

Pont Noir rose from the seat he had taken unbidden.

"Very well, count. Then I understand that you wish this affair to come to a head at once. Be pleased to name time, place and weapons."

Steinmark rose angrily, but his self-control enabled him to say:

"Be it so, monsieur. I do not wish to quarrel with your friend, and, as I say, I have kept my knowledge to myself, even from my chief, Count von Blum. But since your principal insists, I choose sabers, at sunset to-day. I must trust your kind offices for the place, as I am unacquainted with this city, where I only arrived the day before yesterday."

Pont Noir saluted with extreme grace and courtesy.

"Monsieur, the arrangement is perfect. We will take a barge down the Neva to one of the islands, where all these little affairs come off. I failed to catch the name of monsieur your friend."

Steinmark considered a moment.

"Oh, any one will act for me. Say the assistant under secretary of our embassy, Baron Holtz. I will bring him. Have you sabers?"

"Certainly, unless you prefer to use your own, count. Ours are the regular French pattern."

"I will use them. Good-morning."

And before the polite Frenchman had bowed himself out, the big German was again deep in his dispatches, his pen running at a tremendous pace over the paper to make up for lost time.

He scribbled away till late in the afternoon, refusing dinner with a growl of "I'm busy;" looked over and corrected his copy; took it in to his gruff old chief for signature; sealed and directed the big official envelope and delivered it to the waiting courier; glum and stolid all the while like a soldier on duty; and then stood in the middle of the ambassador's room, bolt upright, waiting.

The old count was concocting a fresh dispatch and absorbed in his writing, but presently he looked up over his spectacles, and asked:

"Well, what do you want?"

"Leave till ten."

"What for?"

One was as gruff as the other, for Von Blum had been a soldier under the martinet Frederick in his day.

"An affair of sabers with a Frenchman," was Steinmark's curt answer.

The count looked annoyed.

"Already! And I told you not to send a challenge."

"I did not send one."

"Ah, that's different. Who's the man?"

"De Mauprat, of the French Embassy."

"The old fox's nephew—hem!"

The ambassador knit his shaggy brows and grumbled to himself for a little. At last, he growled out:

"Well, go. But mind you don't kill him, Otto. I don't want to lose your handwriting just now. That ass, Holtz, thinks it's aristocratic to be illegible. Be back at ten. I'll have my report on the state of the army ready then."

"I will, Herr Graf."

He saluted and wheeled about, just as Blum added, indifferently:

"Don't kill him; but if you can slit his nose, I shall not be sorry. A back slash in tierce after a hard rally will do it. Those fellows know nothing about a saber."

Again Steinmark saluted and went away to his room, where he took his hat and cloak and sallied out.

He went down to the nearest landing-place on the Neva, where barges were in waiting, and beckoned to a boatman.

"Is your boat engaged?" he asked, in Russian, for he had not misused his University time.

"Yes, little father (*batushka*) by a party going to the islands for a picnic."

"What nation?"

"French, *batushka*. At least it was the chasseur of their embassy ordered it."

Steinmark turned away, went back to the embassy and summoned Baron von Holtz, a young man born and bred to diplomacy, who said affectedly:

"*Ach Gott, Herr Graf*, why sabers? The small-sword is the gentleman's tool."

"I prefer the saber," observed Otto, dryly. "Shall I have the pleasure of your company, or do I go alone?"

"My dear count, of course. But I wish you would learn to fence. There is to be a grand assault of arms at the arsenal to-morrow for the pleasure of the Grand Duke Constantine, and I am going there to pick up all I can."

"What!" growled Otto, with some spice of contempt as he looked at the rather sickly figure of the other. "Do you also fence?"

Holtz laughed affectedly.

"A very little. I have the theory perfect—at least so Courtrai tells me—but I lack practice."

"Well, come along," replied his friend. "We must not be late."

And they hurried down to the boat, where they found De Mauprat and Pont Noir waiting in the stern-sheets of the barge.

A series of formal introductions took place and the little marquis observed:

"We have plenty of time for our picnic, messieurs. I have brought a few bottles along so that we need not waste time on the way."

And they shoved off and floated down the stream past the brilliant panorama of St. Petersburg in the nearly level rays of the evening sun, while the gentlemen of the party entered into gay conversation.

Pont Noir had a long hamper at his feet, from which he produced a pasty and the promised bottles, with which he entertained the party, and it really seemed as if they were bound on a picnic; for even Steinmark's glum humor unbent under the smiling complaisance of the little Gaul.

As for Holtz, he was charmed with every thing, and De Mauprat was full of wit and *repartee*, including all the party except his antagonist.

Neither of the principals addressed the other directly, according to strict etiquette, and so at last they arrived at a low island, formed where the Neva widened, and fringed with willows.

Here they disembarked, and the French marquis said to the boatman:

"My good friend, it will be very convenient to us if you will be blind, deaf and dumb while we have our picnic. Your fee is—?"

"A rouble for the row, and four more for the picnic, *batushka*," grinned the boatman. "Ivan Ivanovitch is very blind indeed for five roubles."

Pont Noir grinned as he gave the Russian some silver, and they took the long hamper behind the screen of willows, when the marquis drew out from the straw a leather case from which he produced two swords.

"Now, messieurs," he said, briskly, "I suppose it is understood there is no arrangement possible?"

"None," answered Mauprat, sharply, "unless Count Steinmark is willing to acknowledge his mistake before these gentlemen and promise that it does not occur again."

"I make no promises on compulsion," retorted Steinmark, firmly. "Baron, will you see that the sabers are all right? I am in your hands."

Holtz and Pont Noir narrowly inspected the weapons, and the Prussian expressed himself satisfied.

Then the little marquis produced a pair of pistols, which he offered to Holtz, saying:

"Choose one, M. le Baron. They are loaded."

"What for?" asked Holtz, puzzled.

"*Ma foi*, to prevent violence. There is much feeling between our principals, as you may observe; and I am, of all things, desirous that this affair shall be conducted with decorum."

"Well, and how then?"

"Simple enough. We will lay down our rules, and the man who breaks them must be shot."

"I see."

Holtz took his pistol and smiled in a manner indicative of amusement.

"Name your rules," he said.

"In the first place the men are to have liberty to spring back after crossing swords. There is to be no line, like the Heidelberg students have in their duels."

"Granted; go on."

"Next, there is to be no catching of limbs or clothes with the left hand. We do not want a scuffle, but a battle of men of honor."

"Granted again."

"And if the scuffle occurs, we will both shout 'Break!' And if they do not break, we shoot."

"Agreed, once more."

"That's all. Now let us search our principals for armor."

Both gentlemen stripped to their shirt sleeves, and both were pronounced free from armor, when Pont Noir offered the swords to Steinmark.

"M. le comte, it is your choice."

Steinmark took a sword without looking at it, and made it whistle in the air with a figure of eight.

"This will suit me," he said.

De Mauprat took his own blade, the swords clashed and both men leaped back cautiously.

Devilshead and the Demon Duelist had met at last.

It was with interest not untinged with admiration that they eyed each other.

Steinmark, remembering the little bout with the duelist's sister, was unusually cautious.

He knew he could not afford to throw away a chance.

Both men watched each other like tigers for nearly a minute, edging round stealthily to the left, but still keeping the low Spanish guard, sword hand resting on the knee, both out of distance.

Suddenly the Frenchman made a spring, feinted high at Steinmark's left cheek, and then made a full cut at his right side, under the arm.

Devilshead instinctively gave his point a whirl down to the right to parry the cut, and the next moment Mauprat, with a powerful horizontal slash on the other side of the banging sword, sent it flying from his adversary's hand like a stone from a sling.

The Demon Duelist had disarmed Devilshead!

To say that Steinmark was astounded is a feeble phrase. He was absolutely bewildered. For tricks at foil play he was prepared; but at saber exercise he thought even the Demon Duelist could not match him.

Yet here he stood, disarmed at the third pass, and did not know how it had been done.

And De Mauprat had quietly walked off, with an exasperating smile on his face, to pick up the sword, as if theirs had been only a fencing bout in fun.

Presently he came back with it, and offered it to Steinmark.

He had said no word to him yet, but he bowed gravely.

The Prussian shook his head.

"It would be useless, count," he said. "I have already told your second that I have mentioned to no person, even my chief, the fact of my knowing you. If you wish to go on, be it so, but I have not sought this quarrel."

De Mauprat curled his lip ever so little as he drew back.

"Monsieur is not so impetuous as I was led to expect. But there is your friend. He may talk."

"Ask him what I have told him of our affair, and you will see."

"I am satisfied on that score. In fact, strange as it may seem to you, I came here determined only to let you see I could disarm you. For the future, monsieur, we are strangers."

He bowed formally, in which he was imitated by Steinmark; and then the party broke up in silence, the Germans moody and depressed, the Frenchmen smiling furtively at each other.

CHAPTER XIX.

UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

COUNT VON BLUM was writing away as the clock struck ten, by the light of four wax candles over his left shoulder, when there came a tap at his door, and Otto von Steinmark stalked in; saluted, as stiff as a post, and said: "I am back. Is the dispatch ready to copy yet, your excellency?"

"Here," replied the ambassador curtly, as he shoved over a bunch of papers. "I want it

to-morrow by noon. It goes to Berlin at two."

"Very good, your excellency."

He took the papers, wheeled round and had got to the door when Blum called:

"Hey, Otto, come back."

The young man came back and stood silently awaiting orders, when old Blum pushed his glasses up on his forehead, coughed and growled:

"Well, have you nothing to say?"

Otto remained silent.

The ambassador knit his bushy brows.

"You didn't kill him, after what I told you, Devilshead that you are!"

"No, your excellency."

"Did you slash him badly then?"

"No, your excellency."

"What! Why? Did he not come on the ground, Otto? Was there no affair?"

"Yes, Herr Graf."

"Then why the devil! ah, I forgot, but why don't you say where you cut him, Otto?"

"Nowhere, your excellency."

"Gott in himmel!"

The old man started up, full of fond anxiety. With all his gruff ways he loved his grim nephew and was most intensely proud of him.

"You are not hurt? Ach Gott! You are pale. And yet so brave. Is it serious, Otto?"

"I am not scratched, uncle."

The old man stamped his foot and threw up both hands.

"Thousand devils! will you tell me what's the matter, you close-mouthed ox! What has happened to you?"

"The count disarmed me, sir. That was all that happened."

"Disarmed you! you!"

Count von Blum seemed to be too much astounded to speak for awhile, for he marched up and down the room, muttering to himself:

"Disarmed! Disarmed!"

At last he stopped and came up to Otto, purple with passion, his voice shaking with the effort to keep it in check.

"See here, boy, are you the one that General Retz wrote me was such a born fighter and had slashed so many men that they called him by the name of Devilshead? You! the best swordsman in Prussia, as old Retz called you?"

Steinmark stood like a soldier who receives a reprimand, not a muscle of his face moving, and the old man actually seized him by the shoulders and tried to shake him as he went on:

"You, Devilshead! Call yourself Calfshead, Ass'shead, anything else. You! Disarmed! It will be the laugh of all the city. I shall never get over it. And a Frenchman, too! With the saber, and you six feet high! Ach Gott! What a fool I was to call you here! Holtz knows better than that."

The old ambassador had spent his passion and released his big nephew, who had never said a word in answer to all this furious tirade.

He went back to his arm-chair, took down his spectacles again and dipped his pen in the ink.

"You can go!" he snapped, all of a sudden, in his gruffest tones. "When you have copied the papers, give them to Holtz to bring to me. I don't want to see your face again."

Deeply mortified, Otto bowed and went quietly to the door.

He had turned the handle and was passing out when he heard a slight sound behind him.

Looking round, he saw that the old man's face had fallen on the table, and that he was stifling his sobs.

Full of concern at the spectacle, he went softly back and knelt down at his uncle's feet, saying:

"Herr Graf! Excellency! My uncle! I am not to blame, and he will not escape next time."

"Next time?" groaned the old count, looking at him with bloodshot eyes. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that this man is the most expert duelist in Europe, and that he took me before I was ready for him. I met him by surprise, and he was bound to challenge me before I found out his best points; that is all."

"But he conquered you with all your best points," urged the old count in an obstinate way.

"He knew them already, sir."

"How?"

"I am not at liberty to tell, sir. A lady's name is involved."

"Indeed?"

The old diplomatist raised his brows.

"Frankly, my nephew, I would rather you

had been killed or wounded than disarmed. I have boasted so much of your powers with the sword; and now to be disarmed with sabers by a Frenchman who is supposed to know nothing but foil play—it is too bad! I shall never hear the last of it from old Millefleurs and that young fool the Grand Duke Constantine. He is a lover of these grinning French fencers, and he will be boasting of it for a month to come."

"Not a month, sir," answered Otto, firmly but respectfully.

"And why not?"

"Because, before the month is out, I shall know all De Mauprat's best points, and have some of my own to spare, my uncle."

"What of that?"

"Simply that I shall kill him then, or disable him so that he never fences again."

The count turned to his writing again.

"Don't boast. When you've done it I'll make you my heir, Otto."

Steinmark bowed and left the room, as the old man with a heavy sigh went on with his work.

In truth the Prussian ambassador was deeply mortified.

Compelled to meet his French rivals on the neutral ground of international courtesy before the Czar, he felt that he was powerless to wreak his hatred on his ancient foes.

He could not declare war against France in St. Petersburg. It was none of his business, and good turns were compulsory on both ambassadors. Therefore he plunged into his reports to drown his resentment, while Otto more soberly went to Holtz's room and asked him:

"Holtz, who are the best masters here, and where are they?"

The baron began to count.

"There's Courtrai—he's private tutor to the Grand Duke Constantine, you know. Then there's Lafangere, he that was in the Hussars of Napoleon's Guard. His specialty is the *coup d'arret*. He doesn't use the saber. Then there's a Spaniard called Don Guzman Rolando, and Angelo, the English master, and Grisier the last French phenomenon, and ever so many more. They'll all be at the assault to-morrow."

"This assault—what is it?"

"Well, you see the emperor spoils his younger brother Constantine, and the boy has set his heart on seeing a battle royal of masters. So there is a prize of ten thousand roubles to the man who can take first class with all weapons, and a thousand to the best at each of a kind."

"Indeed, and what are the laws of this contest?"

"The first hit is all that counts for victory or defeat. Every man can hold the stage till he is hit, and then the next, till some one has held it for a day against all comers—"

"Where is it held?"

"In the Arsenal," yawned Holtz. "I'm infernally sleepy. Good-night, Otto."

The ex-cuirassier turned away to his own room, and sat there gloomily smoking till the clock struck one, when he went to bed to dream of all sorts of extraordinary ways of cutting and parrying, and to solve, if he could, the problem of how to meet and frustrate the trick of fence by which the Demon Duelist had struck his sword out of his hand that very day.

He knew how it was done, but how to prevent it—that was the point.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ASSAULT-AT-ARMS.

THE great hall of the Arsenal was full of people next day to see the grand tournament-at-arms, in honor of the Grand Duke Constantine's coming to the ripe age of sixteen and mounting his first epaulettes in the guard.

The youngster was known to be the Czar's favorite brother—on account of his boldness and innumerable scrapes probably—while his other brother, Nicholas, who attended strictly to his duties in his regiment and had no love-scrapes, was kept at a distance and rarely saw the Czar.

But Nicholas was next heir to the throne, and Russian czars have never been noted for fondness for their heirs presumptive after they cease to be children.

And Constantine had all the fun in life that a boy could wish, for he was only a boy, after all, if he was a grand duke, colonel and the rest of the titles.

He was ultra romantic. He showed that in

after life when he gave up a throne which he might have had, for the sake of marrying the woman he loved.

And he was devotedly fond of fencing and an admirer of French masters. It may have been that his childish adoration of Napoleon had a little to do with this fondness. At all events, he believed that no one could fence like the French; and as one of his German tutors told him that he was mistaken, he boldly asked his brother, the Czar, to let him have a tournament in the Arsenal to decide the title of "King-at-Arms of Europe."

And the Czar—easy man—was only too glad to please his favorite brother and have a little pleasant excitement.

"It was very dull in the Summer Palace," people said; "and brooding over his father's sudden death was hurting his majesty's health."

So it was announced that the masters of Europe were invited to St. Petersburg to fence with all arms.

The prizes were a thousand roubles each for first class in foil, saber, rapier, dagger, bayonet and lance, with a special class for stick and the long English staff, as well as what the bills called "*la box Anglais*," but there were no entries for these rougher sports, probably because John Bull looked on Russia as a barbarous place for boxing or cudgel play, and would not come.

But for the other events there were plenty of competitors.

For the foil there were entries from France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Holland, Sweden, Denmark and quite a number of ambitious young officers of Russia, who thought they stood a chance in the battle royal.

The assault was to last till a victor should be declared who had held the stage against all comers, and a disarm was to count the same as a hit.

The seats all round the amphitheater called the Hall of Arms were crowded with the wealth and fashion of the city at the hour set for the sport to begin, and the Czar himself had condescended to be present with his brother at the opening.

He caused it to be announced that the victor at all arms, besides the prize in money, would be offered the post of Instructor General of Arms to the Guard, so that the rivalry was keen.

Among the foremost of the spectators might be seen the tall figure and stern face of Steinmark, who had come along with Baron Holtz to see what he could learn.

The Prussian had formed a resolution, but he was not the man to announce it in advance of execution. What it was, will appear in the sequel. The bands played as the emperor took his seat; the people cheered; the Czar bowed, and sat down.

Then there was a flourish of music, and the first pair of competitors entered. "Monsieur Anatote Grisier of Paris and Baden, and Signor Guzman Rolando of Madrid," the bill said.

Steinmark leaned forward to look. He knew Grisier; but the Spaniard was a stranger. He wanted to see if they could teach him anything between them.

The foils crossed, and Rolando gave an instantaneous cut at his opponent's foil ere they were fairly on guard. His object was to disarm him by surprise, and he lunged the same moment.

But Grisier was evidently no novice, for he held his foil firmly and parried the other's blade with a strong beat, leaping back as he did so. He saved himself by a hair's breadth.

The Spaniard leaped back also and came to the peculiar indolent-looking position known as "Spanish Guard."

Grisier laughed and made two quick lunges, ready to leap back from a return. The first he missed, for the Spaniard drew back his body as it came, the second would have struck but for the fact that Rolando gave a sort of wriggle to his body which caused Grisier's point to glide past it. The next moment the Spaniard's foil was bent up in a semicircle, the button on Grisier's breast, and the hall rung with cheers.

Much mortified the French master saluted the Czar, bowed and left the stage, beaten; while the supple Spaniard strutted about, evidently much inflated with his victory.

Presently in came another man to meet him, a wizened little fellow, at sight of whom the officers stamped and shouted:

"Lafangere! Lafangere! Vire le coup d'arret!"

Signor Rolando bowed with great affecta-

tion. He was gorgeously arrayed in the costume of a matador, which set off his muscular figure to perfection, and he looked with some contempt at the little man opposite, who was attired in very plain black, with a cocked hat under his arm.

None of the masters wore masks at this battle royal, and all were in full dress of some sort. The don gave a leap back, another forward, then to the right and left, stamping and shouting in the most imposing manner to shake the nerve of the little man; but Steinmark noticed that Lafangere never took the trouble to answer these wild movements, except to wheel on his right heel to face the Spaniard and keep his sword nearly level.

At last Rolando dashed in a sudden lunge, aiming at his foe's face, and the next moment there was a second roar of applause.

The Frenchman had lunged at the same instant, falling on his left knee and hand extended; and behold! Rolando's blade was over his head, while his own point was in the Spaniard's breast.

Poor Don Guzman was cruelly mortified at his defeat, and Steinmark was interested in watching the famous French master, who immediately after defeated an Italian in the same way, but with an upper stop-thrust instead of a lower one. His secret seemed to consist entirely in "taking the time" on his adversaries.

The third opponent of the renowned master was Courtrai, tutor to the grand duke; but he proved no better than the others.

A short interchange of half-thrusts took place, when he tried a low lunge in tierce, and was pricked in the breast without Lafangere offering to parry.

A fourth—a German—met the same fate, and it seemed as if the old Frenchman were invincible, when a handsome, modest-looking youth, with curly blonde hair and blue eyes, stepped out to face him.

Steinmark looked at his programme.

"Captain Hansen of Copenhagen. He will be more meat for this old fox. What made the young fool imagine he could fence, I wonder!"

Young Hansen was attired in a very simple blue uniform, and he took his place with an attitude such as Steinmark had never seen before, crouched almost double, with the sword horizontal, lower even than that of Lafangere.

He edged toward the French master inch by inch, hardly touching his sword, then gave a sudden powerful beat and a lunge that went home like a shot, before the old master could put in his famous *coup d'arrêt*.

Once more the applause was vociferous, and Steinmark muttered:

"Can it be these Danes can fence? Where did they learn it?"

Presently the usher entered to say that Captain Nachtigall, another Danish entry, declined to fence "on the ground that Hansen was his own pupil," but that Captain Hansen would give the other gentlemen a second chance.

"Decidedly this grows interesting," muttered the Prussian. "This Dane must be something wonderful, after all."

So it seemed in less than ten minutes after; for he had by that time pricked the German, Italian, and two Frenchmen, and had sent Signor Rolando's foil flying to the feet of the Grand Duke Constantine.

"Then the Dane is the victor, after all," thought Steinmark, and he asked Holtz who sat by him.

"He must keep his place all day to be that," was the answer. "Here come the guardsmen."

In fact, at the signal for all who wanted to fence to come up, at least fifty young officers eagerly advanced and took their places, foil in hand, to wait their turn.

Hansen laughed and said something to the usher, who announced that "the captain, to save time, would fence the honorable gentlemen two at a time, if they would let him get his back to a wall."

The proposal excited great amusement, for nobody believed he meant it, but when the young Dane took a second foil and set his back against the wall opposite the Czar's seat, which was elevated about six feet above the pit whereon the fencers met, there was a roar of applause.

The young officers were only too willing to attack. They did not hope to be able to stand a battle royal, but they hoped to be able to hit the dangerous Dane and give their own favorite masters another chance; for every hit

started the ball anew, if the champion received it.

Two of them came rashly in to the seemingly easy task, one on each side, and in a moment more both retired discomfited.

Hansen had lunged like a shot, straight and low, first at one, then the other, while they were considering what to do.

A second pair followed the same ignominious fate, and then the young grand duke interposed.

"This is nonsense," he cried. "Hansen is the master, and these are merely amateurs who hope to tire him out. He has beaten all the masters. I declare him champion of foils."

The young Dane bowed in a way that showed good breeding, and the saber contest was called on.

For this the entries were German and French chiefly, and they attracted little notice till Guzman Rolando gave an exhibition of Spanish style, in which the swords never touch, while the combatants trust to their supple evasions to escape blows.

The style was so new and full of nerve-shaking tricks, that it imposed on two Germans and a Gaul, who came to grief at Signor Rolando's hands; but Steinmark could not see the trick by which he had lost his sword the day before.

At last Holtz nudged him.

"See, yonder comes the Dane once more. He'll try saber too."

And try it he did to a purpose. First he dealt Signor Rolando a slash over his helmet that stopped all his nonsense in short order, and then he successively overcame every one of the masters with the saber, finishing by cutting the sword out of the hand of Grisier, after the latter came to hanging guard.

Then Steinmark and Holtz both started as by one impulse, and the baron said in a low voice:

"That's the trick! Did you see it?"

Steinmark nodded.

"I want to see it beaten," he muttered.

"Probably you will now, for here comes Angelo."

In fact at the same moment a man of medium stature, but as powerfully built as the Hercules Farnese, walked on the stage, and the audience began to cheer again and shout:

"Angelo! Angelo! Hurra!"

It was clear that Angelo had a reputation which went before him, and Holtz observed:

"That's the Swiss, who teaches the English guardsmen. They say he had a phenomenon once, a man called 'Shaw' among his pupils, who killed nine French cuirassiers at Waterloo before he was shot."

Steinmark nodded again.

"I know him. But let's see what he can do with Hansen."

The Dane looked like a boy before his stalwart antagonist, and the two were soon engaged in cutting and parrying so fast the eye was strained to follow the swords.

At last the Swiss put out his right leg beyond his guard to tempt Hansen to cut at it, then drew it back like lightning and aimed a furious cut at the Dane's head; but the smaller man was not to be caught so easily, and he not only parried the last blow but returned it so quickly that Angelo had barely time to parry and leap back, when both remained panting and glaring at each other. They had fought near ten minutes without a hit, and the ball rung with plaudits.

Now Angelo changed his guard which he had held in tierce and advanced under the shelter of the well-known hanging guard used by the German students in their duels.

Steinmark brightened up.

"That is like old times. Let us see what Hansen says to that."

A moment later his mental question was answered.

The Dane laughed, held his point up, cut in tierce at Angelo's right side and came round with his old horizontal slash in carte, knocking the sword out of the Swiss master's powerful grip as easily as if the Hercules had been a child.

There was a deep silence as if of amazement, broken an instant later by thunders of applause as Hansen bowed to the Czar, and Angelo, with a look of deep chagrin, retired.

"I see it all," muttered Steinmark as he watched Hansen. "The day of hanging guard is over, and this man is King-at-Arms. He can teach me what I want to know."

And it was true, for Hansen was crowned King-at-Arms that day.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WORK OF A DIPLOMATIST.

KING-at-Arms, with the refusal of the lucrative post of Instructor to the Imperial Guard: such was the brilliant reward of a modest young Dane of whom no one in St. Petersburg had ever heard before that day.

But, to the surprise of all, the young fencer refused both title and commission, on a singular plea.

"There are two men here, sire, who can beat me easily; one at the foils, the other the bayonet and lance; but they will not enter against me, because they are both Scandinavians. One Doctor Linge of Stockholm, who fences for amusement but makes sick men athletes for his profession; the other is Captain Nachtigall of Copenhagen, my master, who will never leave our service."

The Czar expressed his wish to see these men, acknowledged by Hansen to be his superiors, and the young Dane introduced a lithe, slender old gentleman with white hair, who was attired in plain black and had more the look of a clergyman than a swordsman.

This was the afterward famous Doctor Linge author of the Swedish Movement Cure, and he consented with grace to give an assault with Captain Hansen, "just for amusement, not a prize."

Such fencing had never been seen in St. Petersburg as these consummate masters showed then and there, first mimicking the peculiarities and defects of French, German, Spanish, and Italian schools, and then coming down to their own rapid, powerful style, where every movement told.

When it was over, a short, square-built old man with a gray beard was brought before Alexander as "Captain Nachtigall, Chief of the Military Institute at Copenhagen," who sent muskets and bayonets flying out of the hands of a dozen opponents, one after another, and finally fought four at a time, single-handed.

Then the assembly broke up, and as Holtz went back to the Embassy he said to Steinmark:

"Well, are you coming?"

The big Prussian shook his head.

"No; I have business here. I will be at my post by ten."

"But the ambassador is writing away like a machine. We'll have work to do."

"I'll do it when you're asleep. Good-by."

And the last Holtz saw of him he was pressing through the crowd in the direction of the group of masters, who were surrounded by admirers after the Czar had left the building.

The young baron lit a cigar, went home and reported to the ambassador, who looked up at him over his spectacles with a gruff: "Well, sir; you know your work. Those dispatches must go in the morning. Have them ready."

Holtz bowed and was going, when Blum added:

"Where's my nephew? Why is he not back here?"

"Ach Gott! Herr Graf, he seems to be infatuated with a Danish fencer they call Hansen, and has gone off to make his acquaintance."

"Oh! is that it? You were there, too, I suppose, baron?"

"Yes, your excellency."

And Holtz entered into an animated description of the assault, to which the old man listened in silence.

Holtz thought he was indifferent, but when he had finished Blum said, in his gruff way:

"The Dane was a fool. What sort of a place is that rat-hole of a Copenhagen, compared to this, that he should refuse Russian service? Well, well, go to your work."

"I shall hardly be able to finish it in time, if Steinmark is not here to help me," grumbled the young man as he retired.

Blum gave an extra growl.

"Bah! He knows his business. The papers will be ready to-morrow if they depend on him. Mark my words, Otto knows *when* to work and *how*, better than any of you nice Berlin gentlemen, with all your airs. Good-day, baron."

Holtz went away and dawdled over his papers till late in the night, when, just as he was smoking a cigarette and cursing "such martinetts as old Blum," his fellow *attache* walked into the room, took his seat at the desk, drew his papers close, and began to write away at a furious pace without saying a word.

Holtz watched him through the wreaths of cigarette-smoke, and at last said:

"Well, where the deuce have you been all day, Stein?"

"At work. Leave me alone," was the curt reply, as Steinmark wrote away for dear life.

Holtz looked on a little while longer; then rose, saying:

"Upon my soul, you're a very cheerful comrade. Stay away all day, come in glum, and won't say a word as to where you've been. I swear I'll resign or ask for a transfer. Can't you tell a man what you've been doing?"

Steinmark wrote on as if he did not hear him, but he threw over his shoulder the words:

"Taking lessons. Don't disturb me. I've got to write now."

"Lessons in what?" persisted the other, who was curious:

"Ach Gott! fencing, of course. Can't you leave me alone?"

The baron puckered up his mouth into a whistle and turned away.

"So that's the mystery," he said to himself, as he left the room. "Our big friend is determined to have his revenge on Mauprat. Well, on my soul, I don't blame him, though what it's all about, it would puzzle Talleyrand to tell."

Then Holtz went to bed.

As for Steinmark, the young German went grimly on with his task, writing steadily away into the small hours of the morning.

It was almost dawn when at last he threw down his pen with a sigh.

"That's finished at least."

He did not seem to be sleepy; but he was stiff from long sitting, and had to yawn and stretch as he went away to his room.

He was obliged to pass by the private study of his uncle to do this, and was surprised to hear a voice call out as he passed the door:

"Otto, is that thee?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come in. I want to talk to thee."

The *attache* opened the door and found the old diplomatist sitting in a huge arm-chair, with a lamp beside him, reading a book.

"Are the papers finished, Otto?" he asked, more mildly than usual.

"Yes, sir. I have just finished."

"You are a good boy—a very good boy—worth fifty of those Holtzes. I shall write the minister to recommend that in future soldiers be attached to all the embassies. They are prompter and more obedient than civilians."

"Thanks, your excellency."

"Did you learn anything to-day?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was it?"

"How to hold a foil and saber. The disarm comes of defective grip and position of the hand, Hansen tells me."

"He is a good man, this Hansen?"

"The best now, sir."

"How long before he will put you in trim to kill this Mauprat?"

"Never, sir."

"How?"

The count flushed angrily.

"I mean, sir, that he would not consent to teach me till I promised I would never use his lessons to kill any one."

"Hem! What do you intend to do?"

"To wound him, sir. I doubt if I can disarm him, even now."

"Well, that's all right. But when will Hansen pronounce you fit to take care of yourself?"

"He says that, as he is only here for a week, if I expect to do anything I must come daily for six hours a day. At the end of that time he says I shall be able to take care of any amateur alive, and hold even points with the French and Southern masters. But it will be deuced hard work."

The old count seemed to be considering something awhile and presently he said:

"Do you want a leave of absence for the week?"

"No, sir."

"You can't work all day and night."

"I must try it, sir. The public service must be attended to, and my private affairs come in afterward. You can aid me, however, in another way."

"What is that?"

Otto's face showed a strong spice of humor as he said, slyly.

"Don't write such long dispatches. At the University they used to say 'The half may be more than the whole, if well said.'"

The count colored and grinned.

"You're an impudent scoundrel. Go to bed and see that you don't forget your fencing lessons."

CHAPTER XXII.

AN AFTERNOON'S RIDE.

MONSIEUR LE DUC DE MILLEFLEURS had been in a charming humor for a week. The emperor had shown such excellent spirits that the duke had written home to his august master to say that he was "in good hopes that his Imperial Majesty would be able to negotiate the treaty of which they had spoken in a short time."

And this treaty was to contract an alliance with France and replace the German officers in Alexander's service with Frenchmen; for the duke was anxious to extend the influence of France and counteract "Prussian intrigues" as he called them.

"You see, my dear Dion," he said to his private secretary, "that gross butcher Blum, with all his pretense of frankness, is a deep one; and I was apprehensive for a time that he would get the better of me. But since you disarmed that big brute Steinmark so cleverly, all has been changed. The little Constantine has always been a lover of France and he has spread the story in every saloon of the capital, till Steinmark has become a laughing-stock and his chief has lost influence. We of the old school know how to make everything work for us. By-the-by, Dion, there is to be a ball in the Winter Palace."

"I know it, my uncle. To-night."

"You are aware, Dion, that the Czar seems to be very much pleased with your sister?"

"I know it, my uncle."

He glanced keenly and suspiciously at the duke, as he spoke, but the old man shook his head with a smile and answered the look:

"No, no, my nephew; fear nothing of that sort. We of the old school can only bend to the house of Bourbon. If this Russian meant any taint of dishonor he might look among his own race or the Poles. Why, my dear nephew, this fellow's ancestors were savages, in the days of our own Henry the fourth."

"Then what has the emperor's notice to do with my sister's welfare, my uncle?" asked Mauprat with the same suspicious look.

"Simple enough. There are the Prince Dolgoroucki, Count Orloff, Strogonoff, Potemkin, all men of enormous wealth, and all bachelors or widowers."

"And you think?"

"I think that we may make up a brilliant match for her, while you, my nephew, may happen to catch either the Princess Menzikoff or old Labanowski's daughter, each worth a million of roubles, if not much more. I see it on the cards, now the Prussian's mouth is shut, Dion."

De Mauprat had listened in silence with his head averted, and when the duke had finished he said slowly:

"I will consider about it, my uncle. Will they all be at the ball?"

The duke rubbed his hands and cackled complacently.

"Of course, or why did I speak? You have your invitations. By the by, you know we have to be civil to the Prussians. Old Blum's wife has recovered, and is to bring out the Fraulein Emilia to-night. He has been so civil as to request that a formal exchange of introductions may take place between our respective suites. So you will meet your late antagonist in public. See how well you behave; for all the world will be watching you."

Dion laughed.

"The honor of France shall not suffer. Apropos, do the Russian ladies of whom you spoke have any idea of the match you propose?"

The duke cackled.

"My dear Dion, do not be too curious. We of the old school know how to do our business properly. Madame Menzikoff, as you know, is a very handsome widow, a year or two older than yourself, but her fortune will enable you to live like a prince. As for Mademoiselle Labanowski, she is only eighteen, and her father will leave her twice as much as the other."

"Then of course she is the best party of the two," retorted Dion.

"Not so fast, my nephew. In one way yes; in another no. Mademoiselle is—I am frank, you see—little better than an idiot, and has very bad teeth. It is well to have a fine house,

but if the mistress shames one at every turn, it may not be so well. True, she has a tendency to consumption, which might be aggravated; but on the whole the princess is to be preferred for a match."

Dion laughed with a bitter intonation as he said:

"By heavens, my uncle, you do not mince matters. If this state of society is the result of Waterloo, I am glad I was not on the winning side that day. You seem not to take into account that I may have some preference myself; some trace of foolish romance about love, caught from the republican ideas of the past. Between us two, you know well that the Menzikoff is an old female *roue*, without a rag of reputation left and—"

"Chut! chut! How foolish you are, Dion! Madame has, it is true, seen a good deal of society; but her family is one of the few old ones in Russia; and if you cannot keep her in order in her married life, you need not fear any one will tell you of her faults. That disarm has made you the lion of St. Petersburg."

"Well, my uncle, I will not on any pretense marry the princess. She is forty if she is a day, and I am but twenty-six."

"Your Corsican married a woman older than himself."

"Yes, and had to put her away. I will not imitate him. The Labanowski is an ugly dwarf and I'll none of her. The fact is, I have taken another fancy."

"Is the lady rich?" asked the duke, suspiciously. "No romance, mind."

"Yes. Rich, young, beautiful and independent. More, I think she likes me well enough to forgive me all my duels."

"Well, Dion, we shall see at the ball. You are, after all, your own master."

And the duke went out to take a turn on the Newsky Prospekt in his gorgeous old-fashioned coach and six.

Dion went in search of his sister and found that she had gone out riding with a groom, in the English style, then just being introduced on the continent, and quite fashionable.

He called for his own horse and went off himself; for the household of the French Embassy was very different from the severely practical establishment of Count von Blum.

Dispatches were few, clerks many, and pleasure the order of the day.

De Mauprat was a good rider, and not averse to displaying his skill when he had, as on this occasion, a good English thoroughbred under him.

He was aware he was handsome, for he knew he was strikingly like his sister, whose beauty was all the rage of the capital.

Therefore, though he noticed that every one stopped to look at his figure as he rode by, he thought nothing strange of it.

He did not know that people were saying:

"There goes the man that beat the German they call Devilshead."

Yet that was the reason they were staring at him.

He could see his sister nowhere among the equestrians, and rode over the stone bridge on the way to the outskirts of Vassili Ostrof or Basil's Island, where most of the old nobility reside outside of the docks which cover half the island.

Here he soon saw, ahead of him, a lady on horseback, followed by a groom, and galloped after her, overtaking her in a part of the road where lonely park walls, overhung with trees, lined the way for miles, and not a soul was in sight.

But, as he pulled up in the dust and looked closer at the lady, he perceived to his amazement and some confusion—that it was not his sister at all, but Emilia von Steinmark, looking sad and pale and riding slowly along.

The moment she saw him, a burning blush covered her face, and it was with a faltering voice she almost whispered:

"Von Moor!"

He had already recovered his balance, and was too true a Frenchman not to respond at once.

He lifted his hat with all the grace of his nation, and said:

"Mademoiselle Steinmark will, I trust, pardon my intrusion, but I mistook her for my sister. I had the extreme pleasure of seeing mademoiselle at the levee last week, I believe. I am the Count de Mauprat, of the French embassy."

She bowed rather coldly now, and retorted with malice:

"The first time I saw you I called you Von Moor, and you gave me no other name."

He looked at her as if he were profoundly mystified:

"Mademoiselle is pleased to speak in riddles. At the levee I had not the audacity to address Mademoiselle, without an introduction."

This time she laughed outright; for her naturally buoyant spirits had revived wonderfully at the sight of the handsome Frenchman, who was the secret object of many a dream of romance.

"You have then improved in audacity to-day," she retorted: "for I fail to remember the fact of our introduction yet."

"The formal introduction will occur at the ball to-night. I can say that much officially," he answered gayly. "But our own introduction dates from the time our eyes spoke to each other in the language none understand so soon as your adorable sex."

She flushed scarlet, gave her horse a cut with the whip, and they cantered on. The motion of the animal soon drove away her little embarrassment, and she cried out as they rode on:

"I did not mean that, monsieur, and you need not try to evade the question. I mean that we met once in the forest of Heidelberg, where you were in very funny company for a gentleman of the French embassy."

"Did I treat you badly?" he asked with a little sternness.

"No, monsieur, or you would not be here to-day."

She looked round at him with a look as fearless as his own and rather more menacing, but he only nodded as he retorted:

"Then forget all these dreams of the past as your brother has. The family of Steinmark has at least no cause to complain of De Mauprat. You will be at the ball to-night?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"I shall have the honor to ask for an introduction there, and will not further press a company which may be unpleasant to you."

He bowed and was wheeling his horse, when she called out, rather penitently:

"Monsieur de Mauprat, one word."

In an instant his hat was off, and he was waiting her orders; for both had pulled up.

"Monsieur," she said, blushing and stammering, "I wish to—to thank you, for sparing a life you might have taken when I know that you had reason to take it. Stephanie von Werder has told me how my race trampled on yours, and how much cause you had for revenge; but believe me, monsieur, I do not hate France—I even pity and love it, and I bless you for sparing my brother's life the other day."

De Mauprat had listened to her in silence, bareheaded. When she had finished he answered:

"I have already told mademoiselle to forget dreams of the past. I have done so at heavy cost and taken up the new order of things. You will be at the ball to-night?"

"Yes."

"Au revoir, then, mademoiselle."

They parted, and he rode away over the dusty road at a rapid gallop, sometimes smiling to himself at his thoughts, at other times uttering a deep sigh.

He sighed when his mind was on the dead past, but the future made him smile.

And he read it by the light of Emilia von Steinmark's eyes, this man who had killed scores of her countrymen with such unsparing ferocity that men called him the Demon Duelist!

He had made up his mind to bury the wrongs of France in the love of this innocent girl, and his native audacity forbade him to fear failure.

Occasionally the thought of the brother crossed him; but he dismissed it.

"Bah! I will take her to Paris, and we will never see him again. He will not cross my path since I gave him a lesson in saber."

He rode several miles out till he felt tired enough to return home, and then he took another road, which led in lower down the Neva, by the bridge of boats, instead of the large stone structure.

As he reached there the sun was setting, and to his amazement he saw no less a person than Otto von Steinmark himself, also coming in from a ride, dismounting to lead his horse over the bridge.

The two late antagonists saluted each other courteously now, and the Frenchman, with the good-humor born of his recent meeting said:

"Monsieur de Steinmark, I understand that a formal introduction of the *Corps Diplomatique* is to take place to-night. Permit me in advance to say that I am willing there should be peace between us, now that the promised peace has fallen on our respective countries."

"Monsieur de Mauprat shall never complain that I am lacking in courtesy to a friendly power," was Otto's guarded reply. "Prussia hates the excesses of the *sans culottes* and usurpers like Bonaparte, but she lives at peace with France under her rightful king, grandson of the Great Frederick's ally in the days of Fontenoy."

De Mauprat looked at him in a singular way, as if not quite able to tell if the other were in earnest or not.

"Fontenoy is all very well," he said, rather bluntly; "but all that is past and gone. Will you be at the ball to-night?"

"If I have no dispatches to copy," was the dry answer.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BALL AT THE WINTER PALACE.

THE State Ball was in full tide at midnight, and the Grand Diplomatic Quadrille had proved a success.

Count von Blum, apoplectic but courteous, had taken Mademoiselle de Mauprat *vis-a-vis* to stately old Madame von Blum, who stood half a head taller than her partner, the exquisitely polite Duke of Millefleurs.

The Austrian and Spanish ambassadors had danced in the same set, while the other envoys had been suited in like manner, the quadrille being made double to prevent jealousies as to precedence.

The *attaches* formed a second set, and diplomatic ladies were in request, for the era of international comity was officially opened at the Czar's grand ball.

Everybody was talking to everybody else, and as dance followed dance with occasional visits to the supper-room—kept standing all night—the influence of amity and champagne spread more and more rapidly.

Even Steinmark, who had come to the ball determined never to give an inch to France, now that he had taken his last instructions from the Danish phenomenon, Hansen, found himself fraternizing with the little Marquis of Pont Noir, and admitting that the mistake of the last century had been in the rupture of the alliance between France and Prussia in 1756.

This was after several toasts, the marquis giving "Blucher," the Prussian responding with "Napoleon the soldier."

And then at last Otto von Steinmark found himself side by side with the woman he had vainly endeavored to drive from his heart and memory, but whom he now realized that he adored with the whole power of his stubborn nature.

He hardly knew how it happened, himself. He had intended to keep away; he knew that he was foolish to go near her; that, as he had said to Emilia, a love like his could only end in misery; but for all that, as soon as their eyes met, he came toward her, as if some unseen power was drawing him on, unable to look another way.

She was, for a moment alone, as he remembered her at Baden, with the same half-dissatisfied smile on her proud lip.

It was the same look he had noticed on her brother's face after the disarm, and which had then exasperated him so much; but in her it seemed to him to be somehow different and very captivating and *piquante*.

As he looked, she raised her eyes and the smile became one of soft, pleased recognition.

He could not resist it, and so walked over and said:

"Will not mademoiselle favor an ancient enemy with her hand for the next waltz, as a token of peace between France and Prussia?"

She met his gaze full and answered:

"I am tired. Besides, I never waltz. But you can do better than dance. You can talk of something besides the opera. Tell me what you have been doing for the past week."

She motioned him to a seat on the ottoman beside her, and Steinmark could almost hear his heart beat as he sat down.

Her tone was that of an old friend, though they had only been formally introduced that evening.

"Well, monsieur, you do not speak. Have you been on secret business that must not be known at our house?"

"No, madame—I mean mademoiselle—"

She smiled maliciously.

"You are too forgetful for a diplomatist of our school. You drop the truth as if it were more familiar than falsehood. Yet you can keep your own counsel."

"I hardly understand—"

"In effect, monsieur, you have been doing something I am not to know—is not that it? You have not been seen on the Prospekt till to-day, for a week. Do they keep you so busy with dispatches?"

This time he raised his eyes to hers rather defiantly, for he found she was trying to pump him.

"You take great interest in my motions, mademoiselle. I am very much flattered."

"At our embassy we make it our business to know what transpires in other establishments. After all it is of little consequence. I hear you have been reconciled to my brother, monsieur. I congratulate you, for the worst occupation in which men can engage in peace is that of killing each other."

"And yet you helped him," retorted Steinmark keenly. "It is a good thing for a man to have a sister who finds out his rival's play in advance of an affair."

She smiled provokingly.

"Monsieur, I fail to understand your meaning. Is it the German custom to talk of affairs of honor to ladies in a ball-room?"

"No, mademoiselle; but in our country neither do ladies take foil and saber in hand."

"You are pleased to speak in riddles, monsieur. Have you been studying them as a branch of diplomacy during the past week?"

Steinmark colored slightly and felt nettled. This woman possessed the power of disturbing his mind more than any one could have thought.

"If you want to know what I have been doing the past week I will tell you," he said.

"Do not trouble yourself I pray you. Probably you may commit an indiscretion by speaking."

"Indiscreet or not I will tell you. In fact, you have a right to know. I have been taking fencing lessons from—"

"Whom? Grisier?" she interrupted with startling suddenness, her assumed calm vanishing.

"No. From Hansen."

She relapsed into an air of perfect indifference.

"Oh, I see. Some German. Well, [did he teach you how to avoid a disarm in a duel?"

There was a fine sneer on her lip that humiliated him deeply, for he felt that she was classing him with the rest of the world; and his vanity had led him to suppose that she admired him, as she had admitted to Emilia in Baden.

"You are pleased to be merry over my defeat, mademoiselle; but I forgot what you said and I deserve it. Ladies take no interest in fencing. At least I never knew but one who did."

"Ah, and who was that?" she asked, stifling a yawn. "She must have been a strange being."

"It was a lady I met in Baden, by name Madame St. George. She was as good a fencer as most men, and her brother was known at Heidelberg as the Demon Duelist, from the way in which he killed men with whom he picked quarrels."

"Indeed. And this lady—?"

"Bore a marvelous resemblance to Mademoiselle de Mauprat. In fact it was that resemblance which caused a certain affair in which I was clumsy enough to lose my sword. You see I am frank."

"Refreshingly frank. You must have formed a strange opinion of this Madame St. George."

"Yes. In fact she caused a complete revolution in all my opinions."

"How?"

"Before I saw her I thought that I was callous to all women; but after I had, unfortunately, hurt her in a contest with sabers, I felt that I could cheerfully die for her. In fact I love her to this day, and were she here to-night I would say to her: 'Diane, if you will love me, I will forego all my hatred to France. I will adore you, worship you, do anything to please you. Only believe that I am not a brute like others.'"

His voice had grown deep and earnest as he said the last words, and the lady vainly endeavored to retain her calmness. Her own voice shook as she answered:

"You would say this to her. But to say it

would be madness. Her own brother would be the first to cry shame on her, if she listened to the love of a Prussian."

"Then I would say to her 'Diane, I love you. If you love me, I will defy the world to part us. Even your brother cannot harm me now.'"

"But you forget. You said he was a duelist who had killed every man that angered him."

"And now I say that I can teach him a lesson of which he does not dream."

She looked at him attentively, and for the first time with something like apprehension in her dark eyes.

"A truce to pretenses," she said, in a low voice. "On your honor as a man and a soldier tell me what you mean to say."

"On your honor as a lady tell me if you are Diane de St. George," he replied, pale, with compressed lips.

"If I tell you, will you tell me all?" she asked, hurriedly.

"I will."

"I am she you met at Baden, but the Duke of Millefleurs insists that I keep secret the fact of my former marriage, for family reasons."

"Then, Diane, I love you more than my life, and I ask you to be my wife."

"You forget. You know nothing of my past life. Yours is a stainless name, though that of an enemy. Are you not afraid thus to put your honor in the keeping of a stranger?"

"No, for I have looked in your eyes and I know you would not lie."

"Do you know that I have cause to hate all your race; that they have injured me so that I can never forgive them?"

"I know you have forgiven me."

"How do you know it?"

"Because as I said before I have looked in your eyes, and they say 'I love you.'"

She colored deeply and averted the eyes of which he spoke, saying:

"You read too many things in my eyes."

"They speak a language that has always fascinated me," he replied.

"Then tell me what you meant when you said you no longer feared my brother, and that you would teach him a lesson."

"I mean that I have learned how to beat him."

"Who taught you—Grisier? He is the only man who knows our secrets, and he swore never to teach them."

"No, but a man who beat Grisiere and all your masters."

"When? What do you mean?"

"Did you not hear of the Tournament-at-Arms last week?"

"No. My uncle insisted on our both keeping away from it, for fear we might be recognized. He sent Dion off on a journey, from which he only came back yesterday afternoon. I heard nothing of it, except that Grisiere was there and that our Lafangere beat several. I did not dare ask."

Steinmark considered a moment and presently said in a grave tone:

"You have not done me the honor of affording me an answer to the question I propounded you."

She averted her eyes and toyed with her fan.

"What question, tiresome man?"

"Whether you would marry me."

"It is impossible. My brother would never consent," she said firmly.

"But suppose—"

"I trust I do not disturb any secrets of state," interrupted a suave voice, as Prince Dolgoroucki, a stout, sensual-looking man of middle age, came bowing up, "but it is my privilege to remind Mademoiselle de Mauprat that she promised me the quadrille which is just forming."

"Monsieur permits?" he added, turning to Otto with cold politeness; and then, without waiting for an answer, carried off the lady and left the *attache* alone.

It was with a strange thrill of mingled anger and admiration that Steinmark watched Diane, once more the center of a brilliant circle, but far more brilliant than that of Baden, and realized that his own chance of success in his suit was infinitesimally small.

At Baden, in a petty German State, Count von Steinmark of Berlin was somebody; but in St. Petersburg he was merely a humble *attache* to the embassy of a second class power,

while Diane de Mauprat was in the midst of Princes, Grand Dukes and nobles who counted their serfs by thousands and owned private gold mines in the Ural mountains.

"What's the matter, Stein?" Why so grim?" asked Holtz, coming up. "Looking at the French beauty, I suppose. I hear that Dolgoroucki and Count Orloff are ready to cut each other's throats about her. The old duke has them hooked safely."

"What do you mean?" growled Otto impatiently.

"Mean! Why, look at Orloff now. He seems about as amiable as he might have been, the night he helped the late Czar to a happy repose by virtue of a clutch on his majesty's windpipe."

Steinmark looked in the direction indicated by his brother *attache*, and beheld a very powerfully-built man, with grizzled mustache and a swarthy, determined face, staring at Diane de Mauprat and Prince Dolgoroucki as if he meditated an assault on the prince.

He shuddered slightly as he thought:

"A fat sensualist and a murderer, fighting for Diane, and I—"

He turned savagely away and went up toward Orloff with the deliberate intention of provoking a quarrel. He wanted to fight some one, no matter whom, to vent his spleen and jealousy.

He was as large a man as Orloff, and not so fat. Besides this, the Imperial assassin was past forty, and had lived a life of unbridled dissipation.

Otto wanted to deal with him first, after which Dolgoroucki would be a mere plaything in his hands, he felt convinced.

It was characteristic of his bull-dog nature that obstacles only made him think of a fight to overcome them.

Presently he was close to Orloff whom he knew very slightly, and heard the Russian grind out a savage curse between his teeth.

"What's the matter, count?" he asked carelessly, expecting an irritable answer, in which case he was prepared to retort as sharply.

The Russian turned his bloodshot eyes on him, and to his surprise caught him eagerly by the arm.

"Just the man I wished for. My dear Count von—what is it? I know your face, but forget names."

"Steinmark, of the Prussian embassy," replied Otto, puzzled.

"Yes, yes, Steinmark, I knew there was a mark somewhere. You are the one they called Devilshead at Bonn. I know you. Will you do me a favor, count?"

"What is it?" asked Otto, dryly.

"Take a message from me to that fat beast, Dolgoroucki. I have made up my mind to kill him or drive him away."

"Why?"

"Because he has the impudence to admire a lady I have determined to marry."

"Is that the lady with whom he is dancing now?" asked Otto, coldly.

"Yes, yes."

"Then you will have to kill me too, count," replied the Prussian, coolly, "for I also have determined to marry mademoiselle, if she will have me."

Orloff stared stupidly at him for a moment and then burst out laughing.

"Heavens, what a joke!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE GARDEN.

OTTO frowned heavily at him.

"You will find it no joke. I am in earnest, count. Name your place, time, weapons."

But Orloff only laughed more.

"Impossible, my friend. It is forbidden. Don't you know it?"

"What is forbidden?"

"Dueling between one of us and a member of any embassy. Besides, you are a good fellow; I like your looks. You are, in fact, a man, while that fat Dolgoroucki has nothing but his mines to recommend him."

"And I suppose," observed Otto, more placably, for the count's laugh was infectiously good humored, "that I can't persuade him to oblige me, either—eh, count?"

"Of course not. Though, by-the-by, he would stand no chance with you in any event. But I am sorry you won't oblige me."

"Impossible, count; but my friend, Baron Holtz, might serve."

"Never mind. I'll find some one. By-the-by, is it true what I heard that you were disarmed in an affair the other day?"

Steinmark ground his teeth.

"Yes."

"I suppose you've made it up since with the Frenchman?"

"Well— But why?"

"Oh, because I saw him this evening in such close proximity to a lady of your family that I judged it must be all settled."

Steinmark turned deadly pale and his eyes glittered ominously.

"What do you mean? Whom?"

Orloff looked concerned; for he was a gentleman in spite of his bad moral character.

"I beg your pardon, count, but if I had dreamed—"

"I thank you for telling me. Who is it; where are they?"

"In fact I saw Monsieur de Mauprat and Mademoiselle—"

He hesitated.

Steinmark grasped his arm hard and whispered:

"My sister? If it is, nod, and go on without mentioning names."

Orloff nodded.

"With that lady. They danced four dances successively, and Madame Blum was hunting everywhere for the lady, but could not find her. It was none of my business."

"Where did you last see them?" asked Otto hoarsely.

"Going toward the terrace of the Summer Garden. But, my dear count, don't let me—"

Otto was gone ere he could finish and Orloff muttered:

"If that were an Englishman I could understand; for they are all maniacs at times: but a German! Why should he want to marry the sister and yet be so angry because her brother wishes to marry his own sister."

In fact, it was highly inconsistent, but Otto von Steinmark was made up of contending principles and at that moment one was uppermost.

"My innocent sister in his hands! A murderer! What can he mean but evil to her! Fool that I was to dream of forgiving him! I will lose Diane if necessary, but never will I permit Emilia to ally herself to the murderer of my friends. I will kill him!"

He forgot everything but the fact that his sister's good name was in peril from her imprudence, and rushed out of the ball-room, crossed the terrace hurriedly, and plunged into the shady bowers of the Summer Garden, in search of the missing couple.

Presently he spied the flutter of a white dress on a bench, and came up to it to discover Frau Stock, the humble companion of his sister, who he knew had attended her in the cloak-room, and who was now sitting there, apparently without any object except to pet a diminutive lap-dog of Emilia's, to which she was talking in fond phrases.

"Where is the fraulein, my sister, Stock?" he asked hurriedly. "Have you seen her out here?"

The old woman uttered a cry of alarm and ejaculated:

"Ach Gott! Herr Graf is that you? No wonder Fidele did not bark."

"I asked you if you had seen my sister," he retorted; certain now that something was wrong, or she would have answered him at once.

"Ach Gott, Herr Graf, of course I have. Did I not attend to her dress to-night? and how beautiful she was!"

"I don't mean that. I mean out here."

"Out here, Herr Graf?"

"Yes, out here. Have you seen her?"

Frau Stock began to consider.

"Out here in the garden. Surely I cannot say, Herr Graf. I have but just come out to get the air and keep Fidele from fretting, and I may or may not have—"

"Is my sister in the garden? Are you keeping watch for her?" he asked, in a voice choking with passion. "I believe you are."

"Ach Gott, Herr Graf, what a cruel accusation, when I have always been the very pattern of decency."

And Frau Stock began to cry, at which Steinmark uttered a savage German oath and flung away to search the garden further, a task in which he met with no reward.

There were lovers in couples and to spare; every arbor had its brace; but not the ones he was looking for.

Frau Stock watched him dash off, and grinned a furtive smile of derision, muttering:

"Monsieur le Comte de Mauprat knows how to talk to an old woman. It is 'dear Stock,' and 'Stock, take this to buy a new shawl' with him. Well, monsieur shall not say I betrayed him to the Graf. Besides, he is not so terrible now. Mademoiselle says monsieur could have killed him, and yet spared him for love of her eyes. It is strange how these men take pleasure to fight. I cannot comprehend it."

As for Otto, after searching the whole garden without success, he returned to the ball-room, considerably cooled, to find his sister looking as innocent as a kitten, sitting on one of the sofas by Frau von Blum, who was giving her, from appearances, a lecture.

Otto went up eagerly to his sister and began abruptly:

"Well, where have you been?"

"That was just what I was asking," observed the old countess severely.

"One would think that Emilia had been brought up among a set of English *meeses*, who have no modesty, to escape from her party in this way. What will people say?"

"I will tell you what one person said," responded Otto, and he repeated Orloff's remark.

The old countess rolled her eyes in pious horror, ejaculating:

"And she would not tell me whom she was with. Holtz brought her back, and lied for her with a good grace, I must say. And it was that French villain you were with."

"He is not a villain," put in Emilia, suddenly. "He is a gentleman of the best family in France. As for you, Otto, you are the last person in the world to speak evil of him, for you owe him your life."

Otto turned pale with anger, as the old countess asked, amazedly:

"What is this about life? What do you mean, Emilia?"

"Oh, never mind, aunt," she retorted, with spirit. "Otto knows what I mean. Ask uncle Blum and he will tell you. It happened while you were in bed with rheumatism."

The old countess turned red.

"So it seems there are secrets between Blum and you children. Otto, give me your arm to the carriage. Holtz has gone to call it up."

And as the diplomatic baron was seen approaching at that moment, the whole party went away in mutual ill-humor and drove home, whither the old count had gone an hour before.

As soon as they arrived at the embassy, the countess sailed off to see her lord and give him a lecture on keeping young people in order, while Otto said in a formal way:

"Emilia, will you oblige me with a minute's conversation?"

"She bowed coldly and preceded him into the drawing-room, where she spread out her skirts on a lounge, and observed calmly:

"Proceed, my brother. We may as well have our quarrel now as any time."

"I don't know that it need be a quarrel, Emilia," he responded, quietly, "but I wish to ask you a few questions."

"I said, proceed, my brother."

She spoke with cutting coldness, but he could see she was trembling.

"With whom did you go off to the garden to-night, Emilia?"

"With Dion de Mauprat."

"Indeed! You are more frank than your friend, Stock."

"We are not discussing Stock."

"True. After all she is not to blame. Probably she was hired to lie."

She looked up with an angry light in her steel-blue eyes. She was not a bit afraid, this little German girl. All the courage of Devils-head and more lay in her lithe, supple figure, frail as she was.

"I said once, Otto, that we were not discussing Frau Stock. Barrack manners are not to my taste. Have you anything more to ask?"

"Yes."

"Ask it then, for it is late."

"Why did you go to the garden with Monsieur de Mauprat?"

"Because he asked me."

"And did you not know that it would cause you to be talked about? Do you not know this man to be one who has committed murders?"

"Have you never committed them?"

"No; and you know it."

"I have heard you boast of it. How you killed two French soldiers at Waterloo."

"Absurd! Emilia, you try my patience."

"That was in warfare."

"And Dion slew his men in open warfare."

"Dion! You are improving."

"I call him Dion, because that is his name, as you call his sister Diane."

Otto turned scarlet. He felt this little vixen was beating him.

"She is a lady. There is no blood on her hands. You say he killed his men in open warfare, but I say it was murder. He provoked quarrels with men on purpose to kill them, knowing he could kill them."

"In short, he fought duels, as you did, my brother."

Again was Otto taken aback.

"I never fought a duel with murderous intent, and this man has."

"He fought the enemies of his country, and defied all Europe. He is no murderer, as you, of all men, should know best."

"Ah! why?"

"Because he spared your life when, with all your boasted skill, he had you in his power."

"Very good. He may have another chance yet."

He was furious now and as pale as a ghost, with lips close shut.

She looked up at him as defiantly as before, with a bitter curl of her lip.

"Yes. And your return for his generosity has been to train yourself if possible to murder him."

He started.

"Murder him?"

"Murder him, I said. What is it to train with the first master in Europe for a week secretly? I am not a connoisseur in these affairs, my brother, but I have heard that men of honor prided themselves on never fighting an unequal contest. You have hidden your skill from the Count de Mauprat, because you wish to take an unfair advantage of him."

"Well. Did he not set his sister to fence with me and find out my best points before he fought? We are even. All is fair in a duel."

"Very well, my brother. Do as you please," she said, coldly rising. "But remember this. If you kill Dion de Mauprat you kill me."

"Why? Are you so infatuated with this—"

"—Gentleman who saved your sister from a ruffian? Well, Otto, I love him. You know it. I told you so once before. He and his have suffered everything from us, and yet to our family he has done nothing but benefits."

"Stop," he cried, angrily. "You say he saved you from insult. Why was he associated with ruffians?"

"Because your Holy Alliance had driven him from his country and proscribed all he held dear. Yes, you may stare. I am a Prussian, but thank God I am a woman and I love liberty, too. You have made peace by crushing the only great man in Europe, but you have done it only to rivet the chains on the limbs of the people of all nations."

"Upon my word," he sneered, "your new friend has tutored you well. I had no idea you were a pronounced and fanatical Bonapartist."

"And if he has taught me the sacred truths of human freedom," she retorted, "I am not ashamed of his teaching. Good-night."

She swept proudly away and Otto sat down to write a challenge to De Mauprat. His obstinacy was only intensified by opposition.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CHALLENGE.

BARON FRANZ VON HOLTZ had attired himself in his most gorgeous raiment, and wended his way to the French embassy by noon next day.

The baron felt in his best humor, for he was the bearer of a message from Steinmark to the Count de Mauprat for a meeting strictly according to the most refined code of honor, with that neat and particularly gentlemanly weapon, the small-sword.

"The saber is all well enough," he said, to himself; "but it is, after all, a relic of the barbarous ages, while no amount of civilization can afford to dispense with the delicate and insinuating small-sword, and its graceful and intellectual exercises so infinite in variety and skill. Decidedly my friend Otto is improving. He will make a diplomatist yet with the aid of a little friendly counsel from men who have had experience in the ways of embassies."

And the baron was perfectly willing to afford this counsel, for he was, above all things, good-natured, this excellent baron.

The first person he met at the embassy was his recent acquaintance, the Marquis of Pont Noir, who greeted him effusively:

"My dear baron, my friend of all friends, is it thou? For example, it was a grand occasion last night, and reflects glory on the diplomatic corps. No more quarrels now, but peace and concord over the whole map of Europe. Eh, my friend, what sayest thou?"

And the marquis embraced the diplomatist in the most affectionate French fashion.

As for Holtz, after responding to the embrace, he glanced at the clerks in the office and whispered:

"A few words alone, marquis. I have a little business to arrange."

Pont Noir's manner changed in a moment from demonstrative cordiality to diplomatic reserve. He ceased to address the other with the familiar "thee and thou," and bowed him into an inner office, where he remained awaiting his communication in silence.

Holtz cleared his throat.

"Our mutual friend De Mauprat is well?"

"Perfectly well, monsieur. Does the little business concern him?"

"Well, in fact, that is it."

"I thought so. In fact, I was prepared for it. I told him last night—but never mind. Proceed, monsieur."

"In fact I bear a letter from my friend Steinmark to him. Can I see him?"

"If you will give me the letter I shall be charmed to present it."

"But that is unusual, marquis, till the seconds have seen the principals in the first place."

"And you desire to do that? Very well, I will see if he is up yet. In fact these balls make a man sleep late in the morning. Pardon."

The little marquis left Holtz in the private office, and went off to find De Mauprat, muttering:

"I told Dion he could not follow that little German girl in the way he did last night without an affair with the brother. Now comes another trouble, and one of them will have to leave the city."

He proceeded to the apartments usually occupied by De Mauprat and found the count in his dressing-gown, sipping chocolate.

"Another affair, Dion," he said hurriedly. "That Prussian butcher has sent a message, as I said he would. Holtz is waiting to see you."

De Mauprat looked annoyed.

"What does the fool mean? I have not done anything to harm him. I thought I was prepared for a life of peace. I do not want to have the trouble of disarming him again. Besides—but never mind. Ask the baron to excuse my dress and let him come in."

Pont Noir went away, and almost at the same time Diane de Mauprat entered the room from another immediately adjoining, and came to her brother, saying:

"Dion, I heard all. You must not—you understand—must not fight Steinmark again."

"Easy to say, but I cannot help it. Besides, I will only fight him in one way. We must begin as we finished last week. I am not quite a fool, Diane."

"Again I say you must not fight him, my brother. You love his sister; she loves you. It is madness."

"I know it, but how can I refuse a challenge like this?"

"You can do it with honor. You were the victor in your last affair. You have done nothing to give him a just cause for offense."

"For that very reason I must give him a more severe lesson."

"And I say you must not. Listen, do you love Emilia?"

"So much that, as you know, I have already asked her to be my wife and she has consented."

"And how can you marry her if you accept this challenge? You have a sufficient reason to decline."

"I know that; but what of it? I will but disarm him a second time. And besides that, I have a right to begin the duel as we left off, with his sword in my hand. What is more, I will do it. Go, Diane. I hear them coming now."

She made a gesture indicative of impatience and despair as the sound of steps was heard in the corridor, and suddenly said:

"If you do not consent to what I say, I will inform the police. I am determined to stop this affair. Good-day, my brother."

She swept from the room and had hardly gone when Pont Noir and Holtz came in, to be received with great politeness by the count. Baron Holtz produced a letter which he handed to De Mauprat and observed ceremoniously:

"I assure you I regret, this matter very much, M le Comte; but having no alternative, I present the letter with the hope that some way may be found out of this affair."

De Mauprat bowed and took the note which ran thus:

"MONSIEUR:—

"Your attentions to the Fraulein von Steinmark at the state ball last night were of that character that I demand a pledge from you to leave St. Petersburg at once. Otherwise I desire to renew our interview on the island of the Neva, at the point we left off. If you prefer the small-sword I am at your disposal. Baron Holtz has power to consent to anything."

"STEINMARK."

For a moment De Mauprat turned a little red with anger. Then he smiled.

"Your principal is modest, baron. Do you know what he demands?"

"That you should leave the city."

"Yes. Does he suppose I am a fool, that he writes thus?"

Holtz shrugged his shoulders.

"Monsieur Steinmark offers you an alternative, I believe. He can do no less than place his life in your power a second time."

"True. That is fair. Well, I leave it to Pont Noir and yourself. Tell the count that I do not seek this affair, but that if he insists on it, I will try to give him another lesson. By-the-by, marquis, if there is no objection, small-swords are to be preferred, as quicker than sabers."

"I was about to say, monsieur, that such an arrangement meets my principal's approbation and my own," responded Holtz politely.

"Then come along, and we will do it all up over a cigar," cried the little marquis cordially. "My faith, baron, I must say one thing for your brave principal, that he gives his friends but little trouble. Come."

And he carried off Holtz in triumph, while De Mauprat resumed his chocolate, which he sipped in a thoughtful way, as if considering what was to come of this affair.

In fact, he was not a little troubled in mind, for he really loved Emilia Steinmark, and the previous evening had caused their acquaintance to ripen into an intimacy so close that all thought of Otto had vanished from the minds of both. And now he had to fight him again, so that whatever the result, his relations with Emilia must in all probability be severed.

While he was thinking over all these things, his sister again entered the room, came to him hurriedly, and said:

"Dion, have you done as I wished? If not, you will repent it."

"I could not help myself," he replied, gloomily. "He left me no resource."

"Very well, then," she answered, "in that case you will not be sorry if I show you a way of escape."

"Escape?" he echoed. "From what? I do not fear his sword. I can take care of myself."

"You have then resolved to give up Emilia for the sake of indulging her brother's transitory anger?"

"How can I help myself?" he again asked, as gloomily as ever. "I would give half my life if I could see any way by which I could make peace with honor, but I cannot find such a way."

"Suppose I found it for you," she retorted, keenly watching him. "In that case—"

"In that case—but it is no use to talk about it—you cannot."

"Suppose I bring you from the count an apology in writing, with his permission to wed Emilia, what would you say?"

"I would say that you had been interfering in my affairs, and that your name was too precious to me to be handled by Steinmark or any one else. You talk nonsense, Diane. What is done, is done."

She laid her hand on his shoulder and said, impressively:

"If you will promise me to be ill to-day, to see no one, to stay in bed, to be invisible in fact to all but Pont Noir and myself, I will see that all I have said is done. That is all I ask of you, to be invisible till to night after dark."

"But they may make arrangements for the duel at sunset."

"In that case I release you from your promise. Pont Noir will be able to tell you, for you are at home to him, you know. Come, will you promise, Dion? Remember, but for me you could never have disarmed this man, and you owe me something for finding out his points."

"Well, well," he said, hesitatingly. "I will do that much. I should have staid in, waiting, in any event."

"Very well," she said, smiling; "then go into your room, go to bed and ring for Francois. Then give him your orders. As for me, I shall work in my own way, and you shall see that all I have said will be done. Pont Noir shall bring you the letter or I will."

"I don't see how you are to do this," he responded, "but anyway there is no harm in trying. I will do what you wish."

"Another promise, my brother," she interrupted, as he was leaving the room. "If you receive the letter I spoke of, and the affair is off, I want you to promise you will do *whatever I ask you*."

"Whatever you ask me!" he repeated. "That is a comprehensive promise, Diane. I could not make it."

"Then I will be plainer. Suppose Pont Noir or myself brings you from Steinmark an apology and his consent to your marriage with Emilia, and I say to you, 'Dion, here is Emilia. Carry her off to Paris to-night. I have taken the post-horses.' Would you obey?"

He stared a moment, and then embraced her impetuously.

"My sister, I would fall down and worship you as the empress of all intrigue."

"Be it so, my brother. Go to bed."

She left the room, smiling archly at him, and he shut his doors as he had promised, summoned his valet, and gave him orders to deny his master to all but Pont Noir.

Then he went to his own room and remained there in quiet, ready to justify himself by shamming sickness if the Duke of Millefleurs should insist on seeing him.

As for Diane, the expression of her face changed the moment the door had closed on her.

The smile faded from her lips, and was replaced by anxiety and gloom, while she raised her eyes to heaven, and her lips moved in silence, as if she were praying.

Then she went to her room and summoned her maid, to whom she said gravely:

"Florine, you love your mistress, is it not so? You would do something to help her, even if it cost you some trouble?"

"Certainly, madame—I mean—"

Diane waved her hand.

"No need of deceit with me, Florine. You know I am madame, not mademoiselle. Can you, think you, deceive the duke and every one else in the house?"

Florine considered.

"To deceive Monsieur le Duc is easy enough, madame; but Francois is sharp. In fact, madame—"

And Florine grew confused.

Diane smiled.

"I see there is something between you. Is it not so?"

Florine admitted there was.

"So much the better. I may do better by trusting both of you. Can you keep a secret, think you?"

"If I tell him, madame, he dare not refuse to do it. Indeed, he dare do nothing I forbid him, for he adores me."

"He says so, perhaps, but can you trust him?"

"I can, madame."

"Very well, then. First, I want you to take a letter to the Prussian embassy, to Monsieur Steinmark."

Florine nodded and her eyes flashed joyfully, with all a grisette's love of secret intrigue.

"I will take it, madame."

She followed her mistress to her room, where Diane hastily wrote two notes, which she gave to Florine, saying:

"Attend. This one is for monsieur, and you are to wait for an answer. While you wait, or before you give it, find the maid of Mademoiselle de Steinmark, or else Madame Stock, and give her this."

"I understand, madame."

"I shall expect you back in ten minutes. As you go down, send your Francois to me."

Florine vanished, and M. Francois, gentle-

man's gentleman to the Count of Mauprat, soon after knocked at the door of mademoiselle, received some orders only known to himself, and went away again.

When Florine returned he met her at the hall door, gave her a parcel and told her to:

"Tell mademoiselle everything is there complete."

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN ARMISTICE.

OTTO VON STEINMARK was sitting at his desk writing away as usual and in a much more reasonable humor than he had been on the previous night. His anger toward Dion and Emilia had cooled considerably and the thought of Diane came over him.

Had the challenge not been penned and on its way, it is possible he might never have sent it, but Holtz was even then closeted with Pont Noir, making the arrangements for the expected duel.

And in the midst of his gloomy thoughts about the future of two women, both dear to him, came in the usher, announcing:

"A Frenchwoman to see your gracious excellency, Herr Graf."

The man's stolid face had no trace of expression, such as a French servant's would have shown. Honest Jacob Strauss had no more idea of intrigue than an oyster.

As for Steinmark, the ex-cuirassier grew as red as fire as he stammered:

"Let her in, Jac-b."

He hardly knew, and yet dreaded what was coming.

Presently Florine, neat, small, with dainty feet, well-booted, the snowiest of caps and the whitest of aprons, dropped her courtesy and presented her little note.

By this time Steinmark was redder than before; and as he took the note he nearly let it fall in his nervous tremor, which Florine noticed and thought to herself:

"Madame has strange taste. This animal of a German is nothing to my Francois; much less M. de Pont Noir. He is a big boy."

But as she watched Otto read the note, she changed her mind as his face altered its expression.

And this time she said to herself:

"No, my God, he is not a boy; he is a savage, veritably, a cannibal! I wish I had not come here."

And yet the note was but a little simple scrawl, which said:

"Will Monsieur le Comte de Steinmark oblige the writer by calling at once to see her?"

"DIANE, *née* DE MAUPRAT."

What then made Otto frown so savagely that he frightened Florine?

Was it that he already knew an effort was to be made to persuade him, against his determination, to recall his challenge?

He looked up and growled to Florine:

"Well, why do you wait?"

"For an answer, monsieur."

"There is none. I cannot come. That is all."

Florine bobbed a courtesy and was gone in a moment, muttering:

"He is indeed a savage."

As for Steinmark, he remained at his desk, scowling at his papers and making but small progress therein, till Jacob announced:

"Madame de Saint George to see the gracious Herr."

This time Steinmark did not blush. He turned pale and his heart gave a great jump. He had not expected this.

In another moment a tall lady, closely veiled, was in the room, and he was bowing before her, quiet and composed to all seeming, as if he was about to fight a duel—which he was—of intellects.

She waited till stolid Jacob had closed the door and then asked:

"Have you an ante-room? If so, clear it. None must hear us."

She spoke in a low stifled voice, and he gravely obeyed by opening the door into the ante-room, which was empty, passing through and locking the outer portal.

Then he came back and stood before her, very pale, asking:

"Are you gone mad? Do you know what you have done?"

She threw back her veil and showed him her face, even paler than his own, with the eyes unnaturally large and dark in appearance.

"I have put my reputation into your power,"

she said. "I trust to your honor to keep my visit secret from all."

"Of that you may rest assured," he replied with a grave bow. "I could not love you as I do, did I not respect you as deeply as my sister. Allow me to send for her."

She raised her hand to stop him.

"No. You are generous and noble. I expected as much of you. But I have that to say which even she must not hear—none but God and you."

She was hardly able to speak. So much he noticed, and then all the overflowing fervor of his nature poured out as he fell on one knee and murmured:

"Oh, Diane, I know what you would say. Had you only given me a different answer last night, I might never have written that challenge; but now it has gone, and there is no avoiding the issue."

"What answer?" she asked faintly.

"Do you not remember? I asked you to be my wife and you told me 'impossible. My brother will never consent.' And then, when I was mad and jealous, people made remarks about him and my sister, and I determined—"

"To do what?" she asked, as he paused. "To revenge yourself on me, because you had wronged me."

"I! I never wronged you," he ejaculated, astonished. "When?"

"Listen," she said quietly. "Do you remember the battle before Paris in 1814?"

"Yes."

"You were once in command of an escort of cuirassiers, as a staff officer attending on your father, General Count Steinmark."

He started and got up, looking at her in a bewildered way, not unmixed with apprehension.

"Don't go on," he faltered, "unless—unless you're sure—I—"

"I am sure," she answered. "I wish I were not. It was in the last battle, before Marmont surrendered; and your escort fell into an ambush of French infantry, and was scattered. Is it not so?"

"It is," he replied, gravely. "How do you know this?"

"You will hear presently. Your men rallied out of range and returned to the charge. Your father led them. You had been disabled and your horse was shot. Just before the charge began, a French officer rode out from the ranks, and he challenged your cuirassiers to fight him, single-handed, though he wore no armor."

Otto covered his face with his hands and groaned.

"Yes, I remember."

The countess watched him with her dark eyes glowing with some strange feeling as she went on:

"Three of them went out, one after the other, and the French officer killed them all, for he was a grand swordsman. Then your father went out, against the prayers of his men, and the French officer warned him to go back. He did not wish to kill an old man. But your father was persistent, and called the other a coward. Then they fought, and at last, though the Frenchman tried to spare him, the old man pressed him so hard that in self-defense he ran him through the heart under the arm-hole of his cuirass. Do you remember what happened then? The cuirassiers charged, assisted by fresh troops that had just come up, and the French officer was taken prisoner. Do you know what became of him?"

Steinmark had sunk into a chair with his face covered by his hands, and bowed his head silently, but the lady continued with painful distinctness:

"He was shot down in cold blood by the exasperated Prussians for killing their idolized leader, and when I rode up to the field an hour after, Corporal Bigot of the Old Guard showed me the dead body of my murdered husband, and told me his story."

Steinmark had raised his head, and was staring at her with a face as pale as ashes.

"Your husband! You were there?"

"Yes. You remember it was but a few miles to Paris, and our villa was close by. Well, monsieur, now you see, I suppose, that the consent of my brother is not the real obstacle to our marriage. You could never wed the widow of the man who killed your father, nor could I wed the man who saw my husband murdered—"

"Stop! stop!" he cried in a husky voice. "Not so bad as that. Not so bad as that."

It is true that the Count of St. George was killed by our men; but it was in their mad excitement at my father's death, and I was unable to stop them, being under a tree, unable to rise from a wound. As it was I shouted to them to stop; but it was too late."

"Too late indeed. And yet you see, monsieur, that I, who have all this cause to hate you, have come to your room to-day, put my honor in your keeping, and all for what? Because I have forgiven you and for the sake of your sister. Think of it, monsieur. Have I cause to love you Prussians, that I should do this for one of them?"

She spoke with gloomy bitter emphasis, and Steinmark felt not a little touched.

At length he asked:

"Well, Diane, to what does all this tend? I did not know it before, but it does not change my mind. I had the honor last night to ask for your hand. I renew the request. My father died in battle, and his son feels no resentment against the brave man that slew him. He honors, as well as loves, his widow. I await your answer, Diane?"

Her manner changed now to one of hesitation, as she said:

"You do not mean it. You cannot mean it. It is impossible. We women can forgive; but you men are different. You laugh at me."

He rose and stood before her.

"Madame de Saint George, let the dead past lie in its grave. I offer you my hand and my heart."

This time she began to tremble.

"You know not what you say. You do not know who my husband was. There was a taint on his father's birth. They came from San Domingo. He was a *sang mele*. Your race is pure and noble."

"So is yours. Diane de Mauprat is no *sang mele*. To say truth, I do not understand how that should operate to prevent our union."

She rose up and held out her hand to him.

"You are a noble man, and you deserve a noble wife with a better past than mine has been. Otto von Steinmark, if I consent, will you promise to do whatever I tell you to do to-day?"

"Even to humiliating myself to your brother. Yes."

"That is not enough. You could not fight with him and love me. But more than that is needed."

"What, Diane?"

He asked it in a low rather cold tone, and let go her hand, which he had seized impulsively.

She sighed.

"I thought so. You can do all but forgive, Otto."

He made no answer, for he knew what was coming.

She went on presently.

"It is not enough to stop the bloodshed of this wicked, useless duel, but you must sanction the love of Dion and Emilia."

He shook his head.

"I dare not do it. Every one of my old comrades of the League of Steel would spit at the mention of my name. It cannot be."

"Then farewell," was all she said, as she rose and swept to the door. He watched her going and at last called out in smothered voice:

"Diane, my love, my good angel, give me time. Stay a little."

She came back with her eyes full of tears, and put her hands on his bowed head.

"Whatever happens, I love you," she said brokenly. "You are a grand man; you do not yield easily; but you must see that if you love two women, Emilia and me, we also love two men, and it is impossible to separate one from the other."

He was silent for a space, and at last said in a voice that told how hard a struggle was going on there:

"You ask a great deal, Diane; a great deal. Remember how many of my friends he has killed. I seem to hear their voices calling to me now."

"Is the gospel of revenge to last forever?" she asked softly. "I have forgiven much; cannot you too forgive? Did not Waterloo avenge Jena? God knows we are broken enough. Do you know what it has cost me to forgive, Otto?"

The tears were running down his cheeks now; this iron man with the savage will was melting. She saw, and pressed him harder.

"You have no right to wreck your sister's happiness forever, for the quarrels of the past

among men. They are dead, but *she* lives and can suffer. Otto, she loves him and he loves her. For her love and mine he spared your life when he might have taken it. For mine and hers spare his life now."

"I have promised to do so," was the reply.

"Then complete your act of nobility and spare his happiness too," she rejoined earnestly. "Write your consent and withdrawal of the challenge, and you will never repent it."

He looked up steadily at her.

"I do it with my eyes open," he said slowly.

"I know that I am a fool and a coward; but I cannot resist you. Be it as you wish. You trusted me with your honor. I trust you with mine."

He went to his desk, wrote for a few moments, and then said:

"Read, and say if it will do."

She took it; read it carefully, and then came over and deliberately kissed him on the forehead.

"From henceforth," she said, "I am yours, to do with as you please. Now you may send for your sister."

He bowed and summoned stolid Jacob Strauss, whom he sent for Emilia, and a little later the two women were together.

Then Diane said:

"Sister Emilia, will you take a walk with me? I have hundreds of things to say to you."

And Emilia answered, with a strange look of intelligence:

"And so have I, Diane, if Otto will permit us to go away together."

He bowed rather coldly; for he had hardly got over their quarrel of the previous night.

"I hold no control of your goings and comings, Emilia," he answered. "You may do as you please."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CODE OF HONOR.

M. LE MARQUIS DE PONT NOIR and Baron Holtz were sitting in the private cabinet of the former, smoking cigarettes and amicably discussing the chances of their respective principals in the coming affair, when there came a respectful tap at the door, and Francois—valet to De Mauprat—entered the room and handed Pont Noir a letter, after which he retired as politely as he had entered.

The marquis opened the letter with some curiosity, but as he read it the expression of his face changed to one of amazement and extreme disgust.

Finally he jumped up with the most blasphemous of all French oaths and exclaimed furiously:

"It cannot be! It must not be! It shall not be! It is infamous, unheard of, an insult to both of us! I never heard of such a thing."

Baron Holtz was beyond measure amazed at the sudden perturbation of his colleague in the affair, and exclaimed:

"What the deuce is the matter, my dear Pont Noir?"

"Matter! We are insulted, both of us! Thunder of Heaven! The principals have taken the affair out of our hands. *There is to be no fight.*"

Holtz positively jumped out of his seat and in his excitement forgot his diplomatic manners and scholarly French as far as to rap out a German oath.

"No fight! Impossible! Who has shown the white feather?"

"Both, by the blue! Both! Look here! Read!"

He almost screamed the last word as he shook the letter at the baron, who snatched it from him with an equal absence of official diplomatic reserve, and read these words:

"DEAR PONT NOIR:

"There will be no affair. M. de Steinmark has acted the part of a gallant man; has withdrawn his note, and given his consent to my union with his sister. The two ladies—my own sister and Mademoiselle Steinmark—leave the city at once for France, whither I follow them to-night. DE MAUPRAT."

Then Baron Holtz began to swear as badly as his brother second.

"This is an insult to us, after they have put the affair into our hands. I shall hold Steinmark responsible for this."

"And I De Mauprat!" shouted the Frenchman. "He need not think he is the only person in the world who can fence. By the Heaven, Holtz, we'll have the duel in any event. *They shall fight.*"

And Holtz was equally set on the same plan, so that the two separated to go to their respective principals, literally boiling over.

Holtz got to his own embassy in a few minutes, and burst into Steinmark's room, without even the formality of a knock, at which Otto looked frowningly up.

But the baron was not a coward to be intimidated by looks and he burst out at once:

"It is true then! You have shown the white feather and apologized to a Frenchman, have you? You have preferred to insult me and take the affair out of my hands, have you? But you must do one of two things—fight him or leave the embassy. I will not be made the laughing-stock of St. Petersburg. I will go to the ambassador."

Otto had sat like a statue during the delivery of this violent tirade and then responded curtly:

"You are a fool, Holtz. I am the custodian of my own honor."

"Then, by heavens, so am I of mine, and I say you owe me satisfaction for this insult," cried the enraged baron.

Otto rose up agitated.

"Be calm, Holtz. Don't say that. I cannot fight a brother of my own nation. Do not force the matter any further."

"And I say that you must either fight him or me," responded Holtz, more calmly, but as obstinately as before. "There is no resource. I could not face the world if there were no fight."

Otto seemed to have lost his usual force of character in the interview. There was a haggard look on his face, as if he were suffering some severe mental struggle, and it was in a low voice that he said:

"Holtz, I cannot fight. I am to marry Mademoiselle de Mauprat, and he is to marry my sister. You see it is impossible. It would be unnatural."

The baron burst out laughing in the most sneering way.

"So the ladies have arranged the affair, have they? And it is to be the joke of St. Petersburg that our famous duelist, Devilshead, after a week's practice for a duel, has taken refuge under the petticoats of—"

"STOP!"

The big Prussian had seized his slighter colleague and was shaking him like a child.

"Not a word against them, or by the Heaven above us I'll strangle you."

But Holtz was not daunted.

"You are the stronger," he panted, "and you can assassinate me; but you cannot stop the rest. They will say you dare fight Holtz, but you are afraid of this Demon Duelist."

Steinmark heard, and he released the other.

"Say no more, if you do not wish to drive me to kill you. You know I do not fear this man."

"I know that it is necessary for the honor of the embassy that you fight him. You must do it, or fight and kill me. I know you can do the latter, but you also know if it will be a credit to you."

Steinmark wiped the sweat from his brow, and his voice was entreating as he said, earnestly:

"My dear Holtz, for God's sake let this matter rest. I apologize to you. I will apologize to M. Pont Noir. I will fight him and you with pistols and fire in the air if you wish; but do not force me to fight De Mauprat now. Remember that the happiness of others is bound up in this."

Holtz closed his lips firmly and looked obstinate.

"As you say, you are the custodian of your own honor, but so am I of mine. You should have thought of this, however, before you put your honor into my hands. Once there, no outside parties can interfere. Since you will not fight De Mauprat, you must fight me, and not with pistols either. I do not condescend to fight with a man who declares that he will fire in the air. You must kill me or the Frenchman."

Otto looked haggard and again dashed away the sweat from his brow as he asked, hoarsely:

"Is there no way to escape this?"

"None," was the inflexible answer. "You must fight him or me with the small-sword, and I warn you that if it be me and you disarm me, I shall insist on fighting on till you kill me. I will not survive the dishonor of Prussia."

Steinmark made a last effort in a despairing tone.

"Will it not do if I fight M. de Pont Noir?"

"No. I will not permit. Pont Noir is blameless in this affair, and you shall not

touch him save over my dead body. You must fight Mauprat or me. That is settled."

Otto walked to the window and looked out, his face drawn and strained with his struggle of emotions. The embassy fronted on the Newsky Prospekt, and the usual stream of vehicles was passing. As he looked a large *britzka*—a traveling carriage that opens or closes at will—drove by packed with luggage and containing two ladies, at sight of whom he started violently.

Then he rushed back, dragged Holtz to the window, pointed to the moving vehicle and cried in a shaking voice:

"Look, look! My God, man, do you see who is there? There goes the happiness and future life of four people that will be destroyed by this accursed duel. Can you have the heart to go on?"

But Holtz was not affected by the spectacle of Emilia and Diane on their way to the frontier. After all it is not for a gay bachelor to have much sympathy with the lovers of two very handsome women who will remain eligible after the lovers are dead.

"I see," he said gravely. "You and he are willing to sell your honor for a woman's smile. Be it so. But you must solemnize your nuptials over the grave of your friend Holtz. On that I am determined irrevocably."

Steinmark watched the carriage as it rolled swiftly on to be lost in the stream of vehicles, and made no answer until it had gone out of sight. Then at last he turned with a face set in the old bull-dog look, but sterner than ever.

"Herr Baron," he said stiffly. "I will fight De Mauprat as you wish; but as soon as the duel is concluded, you and I are deadly foes forever. In the meantime you are my second, make your arrangements to suit yourself."

The baron was taken a little aback at his manner and began:

"My dear Otto, consider what the world would say if—"

Steinmark waved his hand.

"What is to be done is your province till swords cross. Please to spare me further conversation unless you have any instructions to give me as to the affair. When is it?"

"This evening at sunset, on the same island. He has chosen swords; but Pont Noir refuses to allow him the advantage of beginning where you left off with your sword in his hand. The boat will be at the steps an hour before sunset."

"Then good-day, baron. Excuse me, but I have dispatches to finish for the ambassador."

He sat down at his desk and was deep in his papers, before the door closed, while the baron went away in a singular frame of mind; half exultant at his success in the battle of wills; half uneasy at something undefinable that told him he would find reason to be sorry for his action of the morning.

He went straight to the embassy and asked for Pont Noir whom he found in his cabinet.

All the little man's excitement seemed to have cooled down to be replaced by a sullen calm that looked as if he had not been so successful with his principal as had Holtz, and when the latter asked, "Well, what news?" he replied, dryly:

"It is settled, *cher* Holtz. He will not fight Steinmark, so we are to measure swords at the same time and place."

"And that is precisely what I will not allow, my dear marquis. You are absolutely blameless in this affair, and he cannot fight you save after an affair with me."

The little Frenchman shook his hand warmly and seemed touched.

"My dear friend, your conduct is that of a gallant man, but it is not necessary. I have determined that he shall kill his friend rather than consent to this sale of his honor for a woman. Do you not see? He would be only too glad to kill you. You are a Prussian. But I—I am his friend. He shall kill me; he shall be infamous if he think of consummating this dishonor."

"Exactly what I told Steinmark."

And Holtz related the result of their late stormy interview.

When he had finished Pont Noir sighed and observed:

"I am constrained to admit that your principal has a keener feeling of honor than mine. It cuts me to the heart to acknowledge as much to one of a rival nation, but it is true. Listen to what De Mauprat said."

"I am all attention."

"I went to his rooms as you left our embassy, and found his doors locked. I thundered at

them, and no one answered for a long time. I thought he was not in, and hunted for him all over the embassy. At last as I was in despair of finding him, I see him coming out from Mademoiselle de Mauprat's apartments with mademoiselle and another lady, the Steinmark, of course. Desperate, I came to talk to him, and he makes me a gesture which signifies 'Presently.' Then he escorts the ladies to a carriage, puts them in, and, my faith, he kisses them both before all the people, as if he were a *rosbif Anglais*. They drive away, and then at last he turns to me."

"Well, what did he say?"

"Astounding, my friend. He said to me: 'Well, little meddler, what now?' I was astounded. Me! his second! and I reply: 'Monsieur, you are pleased to be insolent. You have taken an affair of honor from my hands, and you owe me satisfaction.'"

"Yes, yes, and what said he to that?"

"*Parbleu, mon ami*, he amazed me, for he said with a malicious grin: 'I know it. You arrange to have a picnic this evening at the island. I will be there and carve you, my chicken.' Then he brushed by me—me! his second! went to his rooms and been there ever since."

Holtz rose up resolutely.

"Come with me, marquis. This man shall not escape. I have beaten Devilshead and we two can beat this other. He shall fight."

He took the little marquis, who was decidedly crestfallen, by the arm, and led him away.

"Where are you going?" asked Pont Noir.

"To your principal's rooms. I am going to see him or break down his doors."

Pont Noir said nothing, but went on in silence till they came to the door of De Mauprat's room, which they found locked.

The baron, though slight compared to Otto von Steinmark, was a tall young man, sinewy and active.

He gave a violent kick at the door and called out:

"Monsieur de Mauprat will open to me. I bear a message from the Graf von Steinmark which must be attended to."

A step was heard, the door opened, and De Mauprat stood in the doorway pale and menacing, asking:

"What means this outrage, sir?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE SETTLEMENT OF AFFAIRS.

HOLTZ looked down at the Frenchman whom he overtopped several inches and responded firmly:

"It means that you have insulted us both by presuming to take an affair out of our hands already concluded and that neither the Graf von Steinmark nor myself will allow you to murder your friend because you have sold your honor to a woman's keeping."

The French count had turned pale and displayed unusual emotion while Holtz was speaking. The two men could see his breast rise and fall as if he had just come in from a running-race, and his voice was low and faint as he replied:

"What do you wish? The affair is finished. Do you want me to fight both of you? Well, I will do it if you please at the same time and place."

"That is not our errand," replied the baron hotly. "I said that neither Steinmark nor myself will permit you to kill your friend Pont Noir."

"He is not a friend; he is a meddler," was the unexpected reply in a tone of angry vexation, while a hot flush came over De Mauprat's face and Holtz could almost swear he saw tears in his dark eyes, beautiful as those of a woman.

As for Pont Noir, he was so much hurt by the unexpected speech that he turned his back and walked off to hide his emotion, for the little fellow positively adored his friend the Demon Duelist, now so suddenly changed against him.

But Holtz had set his will to achieving a certain object and he was bound to persevere in it to the end.

"That is all very well," he said sharply. "You can settle your quarrels with him in your own time on other scores; but in the matter of this affair, my principal and I hold that we are bound to protect M. de Pont Noir to any extent—do you clearly understand?—to any extent."

De Mauprat looked at him in a strange sort of way.

"I do not understand you. Tell me."

"I mean that my principal, on my representation to him of the unfairness of his course, has come to the conclusion that he made a grave mistake in withdrawing his note of this morning, and that he is now determined to be at the island at sunset to kill M. de Mauprat or be killed by him, as the only way to retrieve his honor, imperiled by two foolish women who think that love will cover holes in a man's name."

De Mauprat looked at him fixedly. The suspicion of tears had faded out of his dark eyes now, and they were glowing like furnaces.

"And you tell me—?" he asked and then paused as if waiting.

"That Steinmark challenges you to meet him at sunset or he will post you as a coward," replied the baron fiercely. "Is that plain?"

"Perfectly. I will be there," was the low answer.

Then the French count went on in a constrained tone, as if he were keeping down a tempest of excitement all the while:

"And it is to your efforts, monsieur, that I owe this. You have gone to M. de Steinmark and persuaded him that his honor is concerned in killing De Mauprat. Is it true, or do I misstate the case?"

"You are correct, and I glory in the deed," answered the baron with a defiant look.

The next moment De Mauprat had sprung at him like a tiger, and gave him, with his open hand, a slap on the cheek that rung like a pistol-shot through the corridor, then leaped back into his room, caught up a pistol from the table and cried out:

"Impertinent meddler! Let that be your reward then!"

For a moment the baron was inclined to rush at the other in spite of his pistol, but Pont Noir threw himself between them and cried out horror-stricken:

"For the love of heaven, messieurs, consider! This scene is infamous, outrageous, unparalleled. M. le Baron is sacred from insult, Dion! Do you wish to degrade yourself to the level of a ruffian as well as kill your friend?"

And the honest little gentleman actually burst into wild tears of mingled mortification and anger.

His tears had their effect on both. The baron who had turned as white as a sheet with fury, drew himself up, folded his arms and said in a tone of cold concentrated fury:

"It is well, monsieur. You think doubtless to indemnify yourself for being branded as a coward by insulting a man whose position prevents him from resenting an insult. My principal shall teach you that you have made a mistake. If you kill him and not till then, you can have an affair with me."

The count had listened in silence and began to look as if he felt a little ashamed of his violence.

As Holtz finished he said in a low constrained voice:

"I was wrong, I apologize, but you do not know what you have done. I will meet Monsieur Steinmark as he requests. Please to say so to him, messieurs. Baron, I was too hasty, but if you knew—never mind. Go for the love of heaven, or I shall I think go mad. Go!"

He concluded in a wild, disjointed sort of way, with more gesticulation than Pont Noir had ever seen him employ before—he that was usually cool and impassive.

He waved the cocked pistol about in an unconscious manner as if he had forgotten he held it and repeated:

"Go! Go! leave me alone. I will fight. Yes, Pont Noir, be easy. I will fight. Go! Go!"

They retired, not a little surprised and heard the door locked and bolted behind them as soon as they turned.

Then Pont Noir said to the baron in a mysterious way:

"It is settled at last. I will wager ten to one on your man. Will you take it?"

"Yes."

The baron was a veteran gambler, and betting was all the rage then.

"The odds are excessive, *mon cher*. I would take them from any one. Two to one I would not take, for I think my man will beat yours. But what makes you give such odds?"

"I will tell you, my friend."

The little marquis took the other into his private office before he explained fully.

"My good Holtz, De Mauprat is going to

fight his last duel to-day. I have seen that look but once before on a man's face. His mind is unsettled. Your man will run him through and you will see I am right.

Holtz shrugged his shoulders.

"At all events we shall not be laughed at all over Petersburg and I shall have the consolation of seeing him punished for that slap."

The good-natured little man sighed slightly as he said:

"He must have been unsettled in his mind or he never could have treated me his friend with such cutting coldness. I can forgive it all. *Hélas! mon ami.*"

And he relapsed into gloomy thoughts from which he was only roused by Holtz observing:

"It's time we went for our men. The sun will be down in an hour and I engaged the boat in the morning."

Then Pont Noir nodded and went off to seek his principal, while Holtz performed the same service for Steinmark.

Ten minutes later a barge glided down the Neva, carrying four men, a rower, and a sword case.

Two of the men, a giant blonde and a swarthy graceful person of medium height and slender figure, sat opposite to each other and said never a word. The others chattered gayly all the way.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONCLUSION.

MONSIEUR le Duc de Millefleurs had just come in from his afternoon drive and was looking out of the window on the crowded Newsky Prospekt, when a *britzka*, loaded with baggage, drove violently up to the French embassy, and a lady and gentleman alighted and entered.

The duke stared and blinked: "Surely that was Dion. But who is the lady then?"

His question was answered a moment later by the entrance of Dion, who brought with him a very pretty little blonde, and cried out:

"Monsieur, my uncle, congratulate me. I present to you Madame de Mauprat, *nee* Steinmark. *Emilie, ma mignonne*, salute our uncle. I told you, monsieur, that I would show you some one rich, lovely, independent, whom I could love. Pray behold her. We have sealed the peace between France and Prussia."

The old duke saluted the bride in the most gallant manner.

"My faith, children," he cried; "you have stolen a march on us all. This is better than I had expected. But how did you get the brother's consent? I thought he hated us French."

Dion laughed and showed his uncle a letter, which he read aloud:

"MY DEAR COUNT:

"I find on reflection that I am wrong to oppose the return of peace to Europe. I apologize for my previous utterance, and give my full consent to your union with my sister Emilia. STEINMARK."

"And upon that," continued Dion, in the same joyful tone, "Diane and I thought it would be best to conclude the matter before any scruples came into the head of that old—I mean Count Blum. It was necessary to avoid scandal; so I dressed myself in Diane's clothes, and Emilia and I drove away, to all appearance on a visit to a friend, as two ladies. In reality we went to the English embassy, carried off their chaplain, who is a good fellow, and here we are, married safely. *Hurrah!*"

And he embraced his little bride with an ardor that left no doubt of his love.

As for Emilia, bride-like, she said little, but looked very happy; and presently Dion began to ask:

"Where is Diane, Francois, or Florine, for example? I am so happy I must embrace them all. *Hélas! Francois!*"

He began to shout through the long corridors of the embassy, and in a few moments one of the lackeys came, who started back and seemed to be intensely amazed.

"*Mon Dieu! M. le comte* is it you? We thought you were absent on an affair."

"An affair of the heart, my friend," the joyful young man answered, for he felt good-natured to all. "Where is that good Francois, and where is my friend Pont Noir?"

The man looked more and more amazed.

"Why, I thought that M. de Pont Noir was with your excellency. Has he left you?"

"Left me? No!"

He suddenly seemed to recollect something, and his face grew grave as he asked:

"When did you think you saw me go out with Pont Noir?"

"Half an hour ago, monsieur. In fact, I could have sworn I saw you meet the big Prussian gentleman and go off with him in the same boat used in your last affair."

Dion de Mauprat had turned as white as a sheet, and his eyes were blazing as he listened.

Abruptly he turned and ran to his own rooms, found them locked, and burst open the door.

They were empty.

He ran back to the duke; and Emilia, frightened at his haggard face, cried out:

"Dion, dearest Dion, what is it? What has happened?"

He went up to his uncle and whispered, without answering her:

"Take care of my wife. Diane has gone out, disguised in my clothes, to fight my brother-in-law. Some devils are at work."

The duke was too bewildered to make a reply, and Dion, after hastily kissing Emilia as if he felt that he was wasting time in so doing, ran away down-stairs and to the steps where the boats lie.

He was so pale and haggard in his appearance that he attracted notice everywhere, and when he hailed for a boat there was no reply for a moment.

He beckoned fiercely to a man.

"You! block! pig! I mean *you!* Fifty roubles if you take me to Miolai Ostrof in ten minutes."

"Jump in, *batushka*," was the instant reply. "Paul, Ivan, Sergius, quick, help, division!"

Four stout *moujiks* bent to the oars where one usually rowed, and the tide was running down like a mill-race.

The boat fairly flew along till it reached the little island, so well remembered; and Dion de Mauprat rushed to the bow and leaped ashore ere the keel had fairly grounded.

A moment later he had parted the bushes and ran into the open space, waving his arms wildly and crying out:

"Stop! Stop!"

Then he uttered a groan of horror, stopped, staggered and nearly fell, murmuring:

"Too late! All is over!"

A group of four people were there. Two stood apart, one knelt, the fourth lay half-resting in the arms of the kneeling man.

Then Dion de Mauprat set his teeth, and the old look of the Demon Duelist came over his face as he walked on, muttering: "Too late, but not for revenge."

He came up quite close to them. Holtz, with an attitude that expressed the bitterest shame and sorrow, was standing, his face covered with his hands, the tears trickling down between his fingers, and little Pont Noir was shaking all over, as with ague, his face looking yellow and pinched.

When he saw De Mauprat, he broke down completely, and fell on his knees, sobbing:

"*Tue moi, tue moi, c'était ma faute. De grace, tue moi.*" [Kill me, it was my fault. In mercy, kill me.]

But Dion hardly noticed him. His glaring eyes were fixed on the bowed figure of Steinmark as he knelt, supporting Diane's head on his knee, staring dumbly at her.

His hand was upraised to clutch the Prussian's shoulder, and he was about to speak, when the dying girl opened her eyes and they met his own.

She smiled faintly, and said:

"My brother. I knew you would come."

Steinmark looked slowly up and even Dion felt a thrill of pity as he saw the wan, gray face of the Prussian.

Otto looked as if he, too, were about to die.

"It is your sister, monsieur," he said, busily. "Be pleased to take my sword and save me the coward act of slaying myself."

Then he bent his face over the head of the dying girl and was silent.

Yes it was Diane that lay there dying.

The marvelous resemblance she bore to her brother was never more striking than now when they were together. The same eyes, long dark hair, pure Greek features, white teeth, slender forms.

Only now one could see the expression was different. The face of the dying girl was like that of an angel in its peaceful smile: the look on the face of the brother was full of the very essence of hatred, such as had gained him the name of the Demon Duelist.

He laid his hand softly on the shoulder of Steinmark and said in low, rasping tones:

"I will relieve monsieur of his burden till

all is over. It must be an inconvenience. Besides, I have a right there which monsieur will recognize a little later."

Steinmark shuddered all over, displaying the first trace of emotion and asked in a low tone:

"Will you not let me do what little I can to atone for my mistake in this last moment? If Emilia were dying, I would not take you from her side."

Diane, who had closed her eyes as if exhausted opened them again and spoke in the same low clear tones:

"Dion, it was my fault. Do not blame Otto. He loves me. He was forced into this. I would not let them touch me, and they thought it was you, my brother."

"Yes, yes," sobbed Holtz, quite shocked out of his diplomatic ways, "and it was our fault not his. He would not fight till we forced him and it was by a chance thrust he stabbed her. He tried to disarm her but could not do it."

A faint smile lighted up the face of Diane as she whispered:

"No, no. He taught me too well for that. It is best so. He will forgive me now that I almost forgot him for Otto. It is best so."

Otto listened and a sharp spasm contracted his face.

Was it jealousy of the dead in the presence of the dying? Who knows?

But now Dion advanced:

"I must examine the wound. She may be saved."

She faintly moved her head.

"Useless. I am bleeding to death and they cannot take up the artery. Kiss me good-by Dion and forgive Otto."

He came and laid his lips on her brow and motioned Steinmark away. With a look of deep but submissive sorrow the once haughty Devilshead relinquished his burden and rose.

Diane turned her head to her brother and whispered:

"Are you married?"

"Yes," he whispered back, "but, oh, my sister, had I dreamed at this cost, I would have foregone all."

She smiled and answered:

"Best so—she had—nothing to—forgive—I—good-by—forgive—Otto—Dion—for—"

Her voice had been growing fainter and fainter and faded away.

A flickering smile was on her lip and it became fixed there as the breath gradually ceased to come.

Like a baby asleep she passed away, and Steinmark stood gazing dumbly on as De Mauprat kissed her cold forehead and laid her down.

Then the Prussian burst into a bitter cry and extended his hands imploringly.

"Kill me too for God's love!"

But the Demon Duelist looked at him with a strange expression on his white face, with the cruel, glittering eyes and pitiless smile.

"What you ask is impossible," he said, in measured tones. "I married your sister today. It was Diane's last work and you have paid her for it. But your punishment has come. She has gone to meet her first love. You have no part in her. For me, I have fought my last duel. Be pleased to retire, monsieur, my brother-in-law. Your League of Steel is broken at last."

The Prussian looked at him in a haggard, questioning way.

"And may I not even bid my last farewell?" he asked, hoarsely.

The Frenchman waved his hand.

"Be pleased to retire. My sister has gone to meet her husband."

With bowed head and slow dragging steps Otto von Steinmark moved away muttering:

"I deserve it. But the League of Steel is not broken."

Forty years have passed away and Dion de Mauprat, Duke and Marshal of France in the palmy days of the second Empire, sits in his study, gray and furrowed now, and muses aloud:

"Diane, our benefactor is justified. France has risen from the mire of Waterloo and is once more the head of Europe. Emilia is dead, but her brother lives and his League of Steel is forgotten."

And Steinmark, quite bald now, but erect and martial as ever, caresses the head of a huge Pomeranian boar-hound amid the forests of the eastern provinces, and says to himself:

"Forty years, and Germany not united yet. But it will come yet, and till then I cannot die."

Fourteen years more have passed and Steinmark stands on the field of Sedan looking down at the dead body of a white-headed officer in French uniform.

"Dion de Mauprat," he says, aloud, as if the dead could hear; "the League of Steel is forged at last, and Germany is one."

THE END.

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